

A black and white photograph of railroad tracks curving into the distance. The tracks are made of steel rails on wooden ties, with gravel ballast. The tracks curve to the left in the background. The sky is bright with some clouds, and there are trees and foliage on the sides of the tracks.

The Broad River Review

THE
BROAD RIVER
REVIEW

Volume 44
Spring 2012

The Literary Review of Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, North Carolina

THE BROAD RIVER REVIEW

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The *Broad River Review* is published annually by the Department of English Language and Literature at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. Upon request, this publication can be provided in an alternate format by calling (704) 406-4414.

Cover Photo by Katherine Bailey
"Train Tracks" © 2012

Printed in the United States by Publications Unltd.
Raleigh, North Carolina
www.publicationsunltd.com

Broad River Review © 2012
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www.broadriverreview.org

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EDITORS' NOTE

This edition of the *Broad River Review* is dedicated to Dr. Gayle Bolt Price, our teacher, mentor, colleague, administrator, and friend at Gardner-Webb University for over 20 years. Price died on March 6, 2012, at her home in Greenville, South Carolina, after a battle with cancer.

A native of Greenwood, South Carolina, Price joined the Gardner-Webb faculty in 1991 as a professor of English, and eventually chaired that department. She founded and directed both the Learning Assistance Program and the Writing Center, coordinated the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, and served as Dean of the Graduate School. In 2007, she was named Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies, the position in which she worked until her death.

Price earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English education from Clemson University and her doctorate in education from Auburn University. Though she finished her career as a full-time administrator, Price always thought of herself as a teacher. She won Gardner-Webb University's Excellence in Teaching Award in 2002, and also taught for more than 35 years at several institutions of higher education and in the South Carolina public school system.

The staff of the *Broad River Review* decided an appropriate way to honor Price's support of this literary magazine over the years would be to print a letter to Price from a student and former contributor to these pages, Summer Hess. Hess, whose work has appeared in the *Broad River Review* four times, is a recent Fulbright Scholar who is currently completing her M.F.A in nonfiction writing at Eastern Washington University.

Price will long be remembered for her passion for education, her pursuit of excellence, her commitment to her children, and her faith, which served as the foundation for everything she did. We will miss her dearly.

Each year, the *Broad River Review* recognizes a few undergraduate student writers for outstanding achievement by publishing their works. The J. Calvin Koonts Poetry Award is awarded to a senior English major at Gardner-Webb University whose group of poems is judged most outstanding by a committee of department members. The *Broad River Review* Editors' Prizes in Poetry and Prose are selected from among all Gardner-Webb student submissions for a given issue.



In addition, the *Broad River Review* publishes the winners and select finalists of the Rash Awards, named in honor of Ron Rash, a 1976 graduate of Gardner-Webb University. Rash's first published poem, "Last Night Ride," appeared in the pages of this literary review the year of his graduation. Since then, of course, Rash has worked tirelessly to become a prize-winning writer and *New York Times* bestselling author. So far, he has published thirteen books in all – four books of poetry, four books of short stories, and five novels. Upon the publication of *Serena* in 2008, Pat Conroy said, "Serena catapults [Rash] to the front ranks of the best American novelists." Rash's most recent novel, *The Cove*, appeared in April 2012.

We would like to thank Silas House and Cathy Smith Bowers for serving as judges for the Rash Awards in Fiction and Poetry, respectively. House selected Marylee MacDonald, of Tempe, Arizona, to receive the fiction award, while Bowers picked Celisa Steele, of Carrboro, North Carolina, as winner of the poetry award. Congratulations to both winners, who received \$500 each and publication in the 2012 issue. We would also like to thank every writer who entered the contests. A full list of finalists can be found on our website, www.broadriverreview.org. Our next contest submission period will coincide with our regular submission period, which will be August 15–November 15, 2012. Full submission information and guidelines, including profiles of the judges, will appear on our web site in July.

Finally, the editors would like to thank the Department of English Language and Literature for its continued support, both financially and in spirit. The editors would also like to thank university administration for its sustained backing of a literary review, especially during difficult economic times when some university-sponsored publications are not surviving.

SUMMER HESS

A Letter to Gayle Bolt Price

This week I am living at the Hopkins House, a Jesuit Residence on the Loyola University campus in north Chicago. I have a small room with a south-facing window. I look out and see a brick wall that is shaded even when the sun is shining. I am in this room when I find out that you have passed away. I sit on the edge of the single bed and the train passes my window. The door tremors on its hinges. I feel the tight grip of grief squeeze my throat, and I know I am part of a collective mourning. There are so many of us who will miss you.

I am in Chicago for the American Association for Writers' and Writing Programs Conference (AWP). I presented on a panel called "The Creative Writing Fulbright Fellow Information Session." I have just returned from my Fulbright Fellowship in Chile, for which you wrote me a letter of recommendation in 2009. A hundred and fifty people attended the session, and I gave them tips about the application process. I told them that they should start the application early, leave plenty of time to revise, and find friends and professionals who could help address their audiences. Basically, I repeated what you taught me in first-year honors English and reinforced in an Advanced Composition course my junior year.

These ideas are not revolutionary; they are the basic considerations of any good writer. What I realize as you have impacted my writing career is this: the way you taught matters more than what you taught. Your posture toward student writing was an unusual balance of sternness and nurturing grace. You did not tolerate thoughtless prose. You helped me eliminate useless repetition, vagueness, and convoluted academic speak. You expected that, if I had to say something, I say it in the best way that I could and with the crafted vessel of my own voice. You taught me that conviction must be matched by quality. You were for truth in writing, and truth is told best with careful language.

Beside my bed in the Jesuit house is a copy of *The Georgia Review's Selected Essays 1974-1996*. I skim the table of contents and the names are familiar like the names of friends: Eudora Welty, Brenda Miller, and Louise Erdrich. The winter light drains in through the tall window, and I begin to read as the black radiator drones and clicks. The extra blankets I have piled on the bed are heavy on my legs. I remember it is you who introduced me to these writers.

In this anthology is Welty's essay "Looking Back on the First Story" in which she reflects on her first publication, "Death of a Traveling Salesman." She was a little younger than I am now when a small literary magazine picked up her story. I have just started on the uncertain journey of writing my first book and can hear your voice strong like Sunday bells as I leaf through the pages of my draft. You used to read remarks about your students' essays into a tape recorder and deliver the tapes to us to help us make revisions. You were the first person to ever read my own work back to me, to ever savor a sentence I crafted with the cradle of your voice. You directed me not by criticizing my mistakes but by drawing my attention to the passages where my ideas were clear and where my voice was most uniquely mine. "This is a Summer Hess moment," you would say or write into the margins. Because of you, I know I can write a sentence no one else has written, and each one is its own victory and possesses its own grace.

Eudora Welty wrote that everyone has a voice. Both of you have helped me realize why I even bother with words at all. In *One Writers Beginnings*, which I have read three times since you assigned it my freshman year, Welty said, "The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily—perhaps not possibly—chronological. The time as we know it subjectively is often the chronology that stories and novels follow: it is the continuous thread of revelation." Writing, especially first-person prose, has allowed me to weave the layers of my daily revelations into stories that bear witness to life.

It is the day of your death, and I go to mass just after sunset, up the stairs to a small chapel crafted out of an old living room on the third floor of the Jesuit residence. There is no music—just me and twenty men of faith. An old man in a gray college sweatshirt lights two candles on either side of a white cross. The liturgy is as natural as breath, for they do this and have promised to do this every day of their lives. We sit in a semi-circle, and one of the young ones offers a prayer for you and your family. I put my face in my hands and weep as they stand together to take communion. My friend puts his hand on my shoulder and says, "You can join us or you can sit here." He knows I am not Catholic, that I have not been confirmed, and this is a gesture of grace. It means "God is ever with you." I feel deeply embraced by the spirit in this room even as my shoulders tremble. This could be the third floor of an old Chicago house or a chapel. It's all the same. I begin to giggle, my hands still cupping my wet face because I don't want them to know that I am laughing. I think of how wildly ridiculous it is that I have twenty priests

to hold me in prayer while I grieve your death. You would find this moment, this soppy crying woman and all these uncomfortable but compassionate men, a total hoot.

In this moment I am also assured that your absence is a great loss. I will likely never have a teacher as dedicated to her art and to her students as you. But I will never need one. You taught me what I need to know. Write bad first drafts. Revise, revise, revise. Keep working the sentences until my voice is clear and the piece is decidedly mine. You will live on in my craft because I will forever try to reach the standard you set for me. I will always work to write the better sentence, to choose the best word. I light a candle when I sit at my desk to write, and now I light it for you, Dr. Gayle Bolt Price.

CELISA STEELE

To a Son on the Verge of Divorce

The first time you really cried—
not I'm hungry or I'm tired
but I'm hurt—I'd snapped
the car seat buckle shut,
your perfect two-month-old skin
caught in the plastic jaws. I can still see
the shock and inscrutable thoughts
in your eyes. Then a wail, a keening akin
to the lament of all the centuries' forlorn,
the orphaned, the widowed and wounded.

Imagine crying
with such conviction
still. As if the worst
that can be done
is done. As though the heart
weren't a mutt chained
in the muddy yard
of another midnight,
where it barks and howls
until, one day, we have no choice

but to cut it free.

MARYLEE MACDONALD

Tea and Sugar

I felt like an old, gray rug, discardable and as invisible to myself as to my two traveling companions. My granddaughter Jennifer had worn a long skirt and spaghetti-strap top, and our guide Mehmet, who hadn't even broken a sweat, watched her pin up her hair. The heat was killing me. The camera strap chafed my neck. But yes, fortunately or unfortunately, I was still here. I held up the guidebook to shade my face and squinted into a thousand broken mirrors of the sea. "I'm sure beat."

"I can go for a while longer." Jennifer took a chug of water.

Sure, she could run a marathon, but not me. My hip ached something fierce and my ankles felt wobbly from the cobblestones. "Jen, honey, grandma's feet are just a skosh tired."

"Oh, Grandma. You'll perk up. This culture is so fascinating," Jennifer said. "I don't want to skip anything."

Mehmet spat in the weeds. "This last stop on coast."

"Good," I said.

"Next, we go Saklikent Gorge," Mehmet said.

"Not more walking!" I said.

"We stop for tea." Thin mustache twitching, Mehmet was not a man who liked to be challenged, but I was of an age where I truly didn't care.

"What's at this gorge place?" I said.

"Famous butterfly and Hidden City," he said. "Must see."

"Is Hidden City another crumbling ruin?" I said.

"I think," he said. "Last time I there, water high. I no go in."

Turkey's Anatolian coast was just one rock-ruin after another. "Maybe we could..."

"We go down here, and then we go see if river too high. If water high, Hidden City stay hidden. Okay?" Drawing his eyebrows together in a scowl, he looked at Jennifer and then at me.

A rocky path led down the embankment to the ruins of a Lycian necropolis. Burial chambers. If I made it down the hill, I might never make it up.

"Shall we?" Jennifer said.

"I think I'll save myself for Hidden City," I said.

Mehmet looked at Jennifer's scoop-neck blouse. "We go, then?"

“Is that okay, Grandma?”

“You’re a grownup,” I said.

From all the walking we’d done that morning, my stockings had slipped down around my ankles. After opening the car door, I sat sideways, and, one leg at a time, pulled the stockings above my knees. I’ve always been fit, and the thick, elasticized nylons made me feel ninety, not seventy-three. I’d sprained my ankle a year ago, and it ached something fierce. By the time I stood up, Jennifer and Mehmet were all the way to the tombs. A few of the burial vaults were still intact, the stone roofs shaped like Wisconsin barns.

With the hot wind off the ocean came the smell of salt. Mica glinted off granite boulders. It was a beautiful spot, really, and if I’d been here with my husband, I might have ventured down, leaning on his arm for support. As it was, I felt a bit like a third wheel, an observer of the white heat that blazed from Mehmet’s eyes. Even looking down through my bifocals, I understood why he’d want to hide them behind the reflective lenses. In my day, we would have called that leering. Yes, Mehmet was definitely ogling my granddaughter, a girl who, my son said, greatly resembled me.

Jennifer had tanned up. Her shoulders were bare. I made a fist and looked at the skin on the back of my hand. Age spots. The sun wasn’t doing me any favors, and this was the third day I’d been out in it. I might as well have been on the trip by myself, but then that was my life right now, and I had to accept it. The decades had backed me right up against the precipice, and every experience that might have been shared, I was forced to do alone. I missed the warmth in my husband’s eyes and knowing a nap did not necessarily mean sleep. I missed the unspoken.

Mehmet had taken us to Ephesus--Efes on the Turkish map--where Paul of Tarsus had preached a sermon that caused a riot in the Coliseum. I thought I’d seen my fill of Roman columns, but no. Mehmet insisted we stop at Pergamom and, after that, Artemis’s obliterated temple. Yesterday, in Kekova, Mehmet found a coffee shop for me to wait in while he and Jennifer hiked to the top of an old Ottoman fort, and at Aperlae, he’d sent me down a paved road while he steered Jennifer toward a goat path, half-obscured by crumbling walls. I had paid for this trip, so I guess, in a sense, I owned it, but it was not the same dynamic with a third person.

Back when my husband was still working in this part of the world, Jennifer had come for a month-long visit. Wanting some time alone with her, I had hired Bedouins to take just the two of us to the old Nabatean city of Petra. Jennifer had been nine. Camping in the desert under a million stars,

then coming upon Petra with its pink stone and giant columns, had hooked us both on adventure travel. Grandma's Number One Adventure, she'd called that trip. The camels. The stratified rock. The discovery of a place that had been discovered, then rediscovered, and now, was being overrun.

I was glad we'd done the trip when we did. Jennifer and I had been equally matched, with me still able to keep up. I hated the things my body could no longer do.

Sitting in the back seat of Mehmet's car, eyes seared by the sun, I leaned on Jennifer's shoulder and closed my eyes. I woke to see an open valley filled with fruit trees. Picking apricots, an army of women in long-sleeved blouses and harem pants stood on wobbly ladders. Jennifer had brought long-sleeved blouses, but, that morning, said she couldn't see wearing anything but sun-tops in this heat. Now that we were underway again, she complained about the cold.

Mehmet fiddled with the air con. "That okay for you?"

"Oh, it's much better." Jennifer looked at me.

"I'm fine."

Jennifer hugged herself and, smiling, glanced out the window. "I feel like I've learned so much about Turkish culture in the past two days."

"Yeah," I said. And a lot about Turkish men.

The car, dragging a balloon of dust, bumped across a riverbed and crawled up an embankment onto a gravel road.

Mehmet flipped down the visor and looked at us in the mirror. "Secular Islam die out."

"Don't bet on it," I said. "If the fundamentalists try to make Turkey an Islamic state, the military will step in."

Jennifer glanced at Mehmet, frowned at me, and put a finger to her lips.

She'd gone to grad school in Middle Eastern Studies. Now, she was waiting to see how she'd done on the Foreign Service exam. But book-learning wasn't the same as living here, absorbing the facts-on-the-ground. It had been quite some time since I'd lived in the Middle East—Somalia and Beirut, back when it was still known as the Paris of the Middle East, and Tunisia, before Muammar Gaddafi. Turkey had been on my bucket list for a long time.

"You see news this morning?" Mehmet said.

"No," I said.

"Bomb blast near Grand Bazaar."

"What?" Jennifer leaned forward.

"Last night."

"Who did it?"

"Kurd." His eyes flashed.

"I wouldn't jump to conclusions," Jennifer said.

"Kurd do bad thing. Always."

Jennifer tapped Mehmet's shoulder. "Are you Wahhabi?"

"Yes! Sure!" Mehmet said.

"Ah," she said. "Erdogan supporter. Was anyone injured?"

"Six kill," he said.

Jennifer leaned towards me. "I hope trouble doesn't start here."

"It would be a shame," I said. In the last couple years, I had almost stopped caring about this part of the world, a region that had once seemed as complex and interesting as its beautiful, patterned rugs. Somalia, for instance: the land of *hees* and *mansos*, where "combat" meant combat poetry. Like threads of a spider's net, oral verse connected the clans, and if a dispute arose, the most eloquent poets would duke it out on the battlefield of words. And the Kurds. They had a beautiful language, which Turkey had tried with all its might to suppress. On one of his many trips to Ankara, my husband Tom had befriended a dissident Kurdish poet: *Lying beneath the stars, I listened to the bark of lambs...* The rest of the poem has faded away, one of life's ephemera.

"I wonder why you think the Kurds would bomb the market," I said.

"Wreck economy," he said. "Bring down government."

The hand of memory pressed my chest. My husband had been stationed in Somalia in '69. I thought of Siad Barre and his coup. Italian tanks rolled down the streets of Mogadishu, and the ungreaed tank guns shrieked as they panned back and forth across the street. We burned papers in an old oil barrel our cook used to singe the pin-feathers off chickens, and then our driver took five of us—me on my husband's lap—down the coast road to Kenya. Even with Tom's arms around me, I had never felt so physically vulnerable in my life. It scared me thinking about the bomb blast in Istanbul. There would be a curfew, no doubt, and I wondered if we would have trouble getting from the airport to our hotel. It wasn't near the Grand Bazaar, but near the Hagia Sophia, which had once been a Byzantine church and might well turn into a target because of the tourists.

"Maybe we should go back to Istanbul," I said.

"It would cost money to change our flight," Jennifer said.

It might be worth it. "Where are we, exactly?" I looked through the space between the headrests, hoping to see a road sign.

A shirtless, shoeless boy jumped off a pile of rocks and planted himself on the hump between the ruts. In one hand, he held a cardboard sign, and he stabbed the air with his finger.

"Chukumu yala!" Mehmet looked in the rearview mirror. "Why, every time I come here, he do this." The engine revved.

"Does what?" I said.

"Block road."

The car sped forward. The wheels chattered. I grabbed the armrest on the door. My head bumped the ceiling. As the car hurtled toward the boy, I could read the letters on his sign. BESAS. Surely, the boy with his "I dare you" look would jump aside. A small boy with skinny arms. Barefoot. Brown shorts. The child pulled the sign to his chest and froze.

"Look out!" I screamed.

Jennifer peered around the passenger's headrest. "Oh!" she exclaimed. Leaning forward, she touched Mehmet's shoulder. "Stop right now. You're scaring us."

Mehmet slammed on the brakes. The sedan fishtailed, and the back end swung around ninety degrees. I felt a thump under the wheels. Dust enveloped the car.

"Did he..?" I said.

"I not hit," Mehmet said. "Only bad road."

"We should get out and make sure." Jennifer unbuckled her seatbelt.

"Wait!" I put my hand on her arm.

The dust settled. I turned around. Through the back window, I saw the gouges our tires had cut. Mehmet had swerved into a driveway. A grape arbor and low tables hid a whitewashed house. The boy stood at an open door, shouting and gesturing. A pregnant woman in a white headscarf and long apron marched briskly toward us. Drying her hands on a towel, she motioned for Mehmet to roll down the window.

Mehmet laughed. "I teach he lesson." Opening the car door, Mehmet picked up something from the ground. Then he backed away from the house, leaving the two in a dust cloud. "He not do again."

A hand on my breast, I said, "I about had a heart attack."

"I was imagining all sorts of wild outcomes," Jennifer said.

I looked at Mehmet's eyes in the rear view mirror. He looked unrepentant.

"Why isn't that boy in school?" I said.

"Must work," Mehmet said.

"What sort of work?" Jennifer said.

"Stop cars." Mehmet's head jerked sideways. "That place to eat." He handed back the cardboard sign. "*Besas*. Mean 'appetizer.'"

"I thought it meant 'kisses,'" I said, "but I guess that was last year's trip."

"How's your ankle?" Jennifer said.

"It's holding up."

Last year, Jennifer hadn't been able to break away from her Master's thesis, so I'd decided to travel with a group—couples, mostly, and other widows. Mexico had been a disappointment. The sinking cathedral and floating gardens. A quick look at a Rivera mural. The Pyramid of the Sun. Getting off the bus, I'd sprained my ankle and finished the trip on crutches.

"Is the gorge rocky?" I said.

"Everything's rocky." Jennifer laughed.

"I'm glad we're down to the last ruin."

Mehmet looked at me in the rear view mirror. His eyes looked like I'd said Kurds were the best thing since sliced bread.

"What? You no like ruins?"

"After a while," I said, "one ruin starts looking like all the rest."

"Hidden City not same as other." He pulled into a parking lot and stopped the car. "You see. Nature place."

"Where exactly are we?" I said.

"Taurus mountain," he said.

Taurus, the Bull. Tom was Taurus, not that I particularly believed in the signs of the Zodiac.

Mehmet stopped the car. We were in a parking lot with three or four other cars. I opened my door. "Ah," I said, refreshed by the breeze. "This is more like it."

The Taurus mountains loomed up at the parking lot's far end. The rock was gray, with patches of pink, and I could not be sure if the color came from stone or from lichen. This was a geologic wonder—the vee-shaped cleft of a mountain split down the middle by the earth's upheaval. Already in shadow, the right face of the gorge rose straight up, like a loaf of pumpernickel lopped off by a knife. To the left of the gorge, in sunlight still, though I could see a shadow advancing up the wall, stood the higher and less steep half of what had once been one, solid mountain. I couldn't help but think of the Pied Piper of Hamelin and the way the cliff opened and all the children disappeared.

Jennifer looked around, threw her hands above her head, and took a big drink of air. "This is off the beaten path for sure."

"Local place," Mehmet said. "You first tourist I take."

I do believe Mehmet would have run that little boy over. It made me not like our guide, though I had thought him overly attentive until then. I reached back in the car for my bag.

"If I give you my money," I said, "is it safe to leave my purse in the trunk?"

"Maybe better, you keep," he said. "And bring camera."

Jennifer hugged herself and spun around. "Smell the air, Grandma. Listen to the music of the river. Are we in the real world, or in a place fantastical?"

"The real world." There was only one world, unfortunately, the world of putting one foot in front of another. I hoped we wouldn't have to switchback up a grade or tackle another steep descent.

We crossed a bridge, and below it, the water being flushed from the mountains made me nearly deaf. Then, the bridge turned into a wooden walkway. One person wide, a few feet above the water, the walkway cantilevered out from the canyon's wall. Through the knotholes and cracks, I looked down at the roiling water. Mehmet stopped and pointed up. A clothesline connected the canyon's walls, and red Turkish flag with its crescent moon and five-pointed star flapped in the breeze. Mehmet cupped a hand to my ear.

"Moon star," he shouted. "*Ay Yildiz*."

I nodded that I heard him. "How much further?"

"Near," he said. "And flat all way."

He started off, and Jennifer hurried after him.

Families passed, going in the opposite direction, and the rhythms of their different strides made the walkway dip and sway. Pricks of pain shot through my ankle.

The gorge widened. Built out over the river were two tea shops, one with reclining pillows and low tables, and the other with wooden chairs. I wondered if this was where Mehmet wanted to stop for tea. Hoping so, I decided to catch my breath. Mehmet, without looking back, continued his forced march past the little cafes. The walkway ended, and he hopped down onto the bank of the river. Continuing his long strides, he leaned forward and hooked his thumbs into the back pockets of his jeans. Jennifer ran to catch up. They spoke a moment. She gave me a roundhouse wave. If I didn't try to

complete this last stop on our itinerary, I would not be the cool, adventuresome grandma. I would be a burden, and she wouldn't want to go on another trip.

I stepped down onto the sandy bank, and not far ahead, saw a wooden bookcase divided into cubbyholes, like the old post office boxes in the hotels of my youth. In each cubby was tucked a pair of plastic shoes. Kneeling on the ground, an old Turk in a red fez had begun fitting the shoes. Mehmet and Jennifer sat on a tilted bench. The wind blew a strand of hair across Jennifer's mouth. Mehmet brushed it back. "Hey!" I said, coming up to them.

Jennifer offered her place. I looked down at her shoes. They were like Mary Janes. Through clear plastic, I could see red toenails.

"These shoes feel kind of tight," she said.

"Better if tight," Mehmet said, "or you walk out of shoes. Then I must carry you."

"Don't be fresh," I said.

Mehmet motioned for me to sit back down. "I joke, Madame. If I carry she, I fall down, too."

"Where is this Hidden City?" I said.

"That way." He waved toward the canyon.

"More walking?" I said. "I mean, it was a mile to here already."

"I can take pictures," Jennifer said. She had one of those tiny cameras that hooked up to her computer.

I patted my Nikon. "I prefer slides."

Jennifer looked up. "It's not going to be light much longer."

"Must hurry," Mehmet said. Carefully, he began folding the hem of his pants, creasing each fold with his nails in a gesture that reminded me of a child folding a paper airplane. At one moment, he could run down a child, and in the next, be the boy himself, worried about ruining his precious pants. Jennifer tied the Indian fabric of her skirt between her legs and waded in. A wave bounced against her back, soaking the fabric. Her thong undies showed through. Mehmet look up, tugged the folded hems of his trousers above his knees, splashed through the water, and took her hand.

"Watch out," he said. "You slip."

Jennifer, wobbling like a tightrope walker, called back. "It's freezing."

"Remember this is Turkey!" The waterfall sucked my words into the vacuum of its roar. I turned to the man in the fez kneeling at my feet. His wool sport coat was a size too large, and of a color that was neither brown nor gray, more like a rags Turks used when they mopped the floor.

"Size 9." I held up nine fingers.

He looked at my hands. His eyes were a startling greenish brown and flecked with yellow, his eyelashes as long as a child's. The bench shifted, creaking like a long closed door. "Oh!" I said, steadying myself. He untied my shoelaces and matched the soles with a pair of clear plastic slippers. He left on my support hose. It wouldn't hurt to get those wet. My ankle would thank me. As I fastened the straps of my slippers, I looked into the breast pocket of man's jacket and saw a roll of Turkish lira. I wondered what I should tip and wished Mehmet had not left me stranded here. I took out a fifty lira note, and the man shook his head no, flattened his palm and traced three hundred on it. I gave him that, and he examined the bills front and back, then nodded for me to go.

Across the channel, Jennifer and Mehmet waited on the gravel bank. Jennifer held up her hands like a crossing guard, telling me it wasn't safe. Further upstream, just beyond them, I could see that the river was just a trickle through that branch of the canyon. The water surging through the channel came from water spilling from crevices in the cliff to my left. They were like jets in a fun park, but where the springs joined at the bottom, a milky plume fanned out.

Two men, their shirts open and shorts turned up, headed back in my direction. I waited to see how they crossed. Before plunging into the current, they slid down the gravel embankment and walked along the opposite canyon wall, putting one hand against the rock for balance. Ten giant steps, like the kind we used to take in "Mother May I," and then they were over and climbing the bank to surrender their shoes. Ten steps. I could do it.

I put the strap of my purse over one shoulder, the camera strap over the other, and wished that I could leave them in the old man's care. It probably wasn't safe. His sunken jaws and gray whiskers made him look like the poorest of the poor, someone whose existence was so precarious that working for this shoe concession was the best he could do.

When I stepped in the water, a volt of ice raced up my right leg and exploded in a fireball against my heart. Cubes of ice caught in my throat. The current dragged my right leg sideways. Rocks moved. My feet slipped, and to keep my balance, I stepped out into the flow with my left foot. Water up to the hips. A lunge forward. The effort to stay upright. My thighs burned. I started to sit down.

Mehmet's hand, fleshy and damp, grabbed mine. One step at a time, he pulled me to the other side, scrambled up the loose rock, turned, and wrestled me from the water. Jennifer grabbed my forearm. Dry land.

I staggered to a boulder.

"Sit," Jennifer said.

"Don't worry, I will." My heart pounded like a fist.

"Mehmet didn't think you should cross." Jennifer took the straps from around my neck. She kissed the top of my head, and my cheeks winched up.

"This hard part," Mehmet said. "Please, Madame, you catch breath. Is famous place. Must see."

"We'll go back," Jennifer said.

"No, we've made it this far," I said.

Mehmet looked over his shoulder and ran a hand down his face.

"Are the ruins just wonderful?" I said. "Am I going to see the Parthenon if I walk back there?"

"That Greek place." His eyes looked stony.

How careless of me. No love lost between the Turks and Greeks.

"I meant Ephesus," I said.

"No, not like," he said.

Jennifer bent over, hands on her knees. "Listen, Grandma. Why don't Mehmet and I see if the walking gets easier. If it does, we'll come back for you, and if not, you stay put till we return. Does that sound like a plan?"

These are your choices, children. "Sure. Go ahead."

Looking down at me, Mehmet said, "I think butterfly more special thing about this place."

"Okay," I said. "I'll sit here and see if I see a butterfly."

"Good," Jennifer said, bending down to give me a hug.

Mehmet took off his river shoes. In bare feet, he started down the canyon.

Jennifer, in plastic slippers, hot-footed to catch up. "Ow, ow, ow!"

I swiveled around so I could follow them. They vanished around a bend. The boulder I sat on came to a point, so it was kind of like sitting on the apex of a teeter-totter. The gouging in my rear made my foot tingle. My leg was going to sleep. Shadows began to cover the canyon floor. The pools of violet water looked shallow. I forced myself to stand. Rocks dug into my feet. "Ow! Ow! Ow!" I took three steps. Enough. Though I clapped my arms and hugged myself, my teeth chattered. If I stood here much longer, I'd get hypothermia.

Two Turkish families passed me, coming out. The men, with small children on their shoulders, waded through the rushing water, followed by their wives, women who delicately lifted their heavy skirts and made the crossing look easy. The pain of walking on the rocks would be limited to a dozen steps. I would do what the two men had done earlier, work my way along the canyon wall, then make a dash across the channel.

Cold shocked my ankles. The water deepened and the current sucked my feet. Sucking in an “Aaarrrrgh!” I put a hand against the canyon wall and pushed off, my eye on the old Turk kneeling in front of the wooden cubby, his back to me. With each step, my feet turned more wooden. My shoes slipped on the stones, but I could not feel the stones themselves, and my purse and camera swung in opposite directions, like dual pendulums of a manic clock. I gasped and looked downriver. If I fell, it would be a quick trip. Somewhere down there, the channel would widen, and I could just float until I saw a sandy riverbank. It was the stones. The stones were killing me. I lifted my camera and purse, holding them above my head, and the water rose to my waist. In rainbows of spray, the old man appeared. He took my hand and pulled me from my crouch, then dragged me toward the shore. Standing in foot-deep water, I couldn’t move. The old Turk scrambled up the bank and leaned toward me, holding out his palms. I put my hands in his, and he pulled me to dry land.

“It’s the shoes.” Seated on the bench, I hiccupped tears. “The shoes are like paper.”

Nodding, he knelt on one knee. His red fez covered his gray, clipped eyebrows. He undid the buckles of the hateful slippers.

“Oh, God, it feels so good to get those off!” I said.

He balanced my right foot on his thigh and, with a dirty towel, wiped my leg from the knee to the ankle. The towel, and his fingers squeezing, did not so much move down my leg as caress it, squeeze it as if shifting all the muscle-ache and tiredness right down through the weary arch of my foot and across the rock-bruised balls. He discarded the towel, reached under the hem of my skirt and found the rolled top of my stocking. He slipped it down my leg. The tips of his fingers touched my skin. His lips compressed. He closed his eyes. I gripped the splintered bench. His fingers clasped the sides of my feet. With my stockings off, he separated my toes and examined them one by one. I wiped my eyes. His hands warmed my feet.

He reached back for my shoes, loosened the laces, and pulled up the tongues. The hollow bunion holes and comforting arch supports made me smile. He sprang up from his squat, and with a furtive gesture, pushed my stockings into the pocket of his pants.

“You want those?” I said.

He nodded, and then flapping his arms, pointed to the tea shop.

“All right.” I would hurry. Maybe the tea shop was about to close. Warm tea would feel good, and Jennifer would be none that wiser that her hypothermic grandmother had almost drowned.

I stood, and the old man took my hand, brushing his lips across it in a gesture that was both gallant and absurd.

"Thank you," I said.

"*Teşekkür*," he said, his eyes sparkling. "Tea and sugar."

Walking toward the tea shop, I felt the planks flex and vault me forward as if I were bouncing on a trampoline. Giddy with relief, I stopped at the first table. A waiter brought apple tea in a glass cup, two cubes of sugar, and a tiny spoon.

"*Teşekkür*," I said.

He smiled and looked in my eyes. I stretched my legs and leaned back. When he turned to go, I called after him, "*Teşekkür!*"

"*Teşekkür ederim*." He turned, smiled, and bounced down the steps to the kitchen on the other side of the river. Learning to speak the language was what I had always loved about being in a new posting: the small niceties of life that signaled of our common humanity.

Warmed by the tea, I watched Jennifer and Mehmet slog back through the water. Wet from the waist down, Jennifer sat on the bench, and the old man knelt before her. With the same towel, he wiped her feet. The shoe-man's fingers slid down each of Jennifer's toes. Jennifer looked up at Mehmet, who spoke sharply, then swatted the old man with the back of his hand. The man in the fez threw the towel to Mehmet and hobbled away.

Mehmet wiped Jennifer's feet and placed her shoes on the ground. While she put them on, he rolled down his pants, slipped on his sandals, looked over, and saw me on the tea platform. He tapped Jennifer on the shoulder. She looked over and frowned. Busted.

A moment later, Mehmet and Jennifer stood by my table.

"That long walk," Mehmet said. "I tired."

"It was a hard walk, Grandma," Jennifer said. "You wouldn't have liked it."

I waited for them to ask how I'd crossed the river, to be surprised or to compliment me on making it back alive. Nothing. But then, of course, not. They were young.

Mehmet turned. At the next restaurant, low Turkish couches were covered with faded, brick-red rugs; silver tables shimmered in the raking light. "We take tea there."

"Why not here?" I said.

"Ottoman couch." He picked up my tea cup, and when the little

spoon dropped, he snapped his fingers for the waiter. With me on one couch and Jennifer and Mehmet on the other, our guide leaned back, sighed, and dipped his hand in the river. "Look," he said.

Above, caves dotted the sheer rock wall. I stretched my legs.

"Your legs are bruised!" Jennifer reached down and touched a purple welt. "Did you fall?"

"Certainly not! I'm not helpless."

"We walked a mile into the canyon and never saw a single butterfly or ruins either."

"I think call 'Hidden City' 'cause big rock fall down."

"A natural ruin," I said. "Like me."

Mehmet threw back his head and, with a hand on his stomach, laughed as if I had said something funny, when in truth, I was just stating a fact. Jennifer smiled and finger-combed her ponytail. They had no idea what that meant, the difference between old when you could still do things, and the old I was now, when I had to be careful what I attempted.

The waiter arrived with tea. Steam rose from the glasses. At the distant opening of the canyon, a fireball of light hovered above the water, and I thought of the River Styx, the underground stream into which all life disappears. Mehmet spread his arms and lounged against the pillows, his ankle near Jennifer's. As if accidentally, Jennifer let her foot graze his.

"Sorry. I can move feet if in your way."

"They're not in my way," Jennifer said.

I remembered the footsie dance. "I'd like another tea," I said.

Mehmet shouted to the waiter.

The tea appeared before me. "*Teşekkür*," I said.

Mehmet said, "Good speak."

"Turkish is a beautiful language," I said. "Like poetry."

I looked up. Clinging to the sheer rock wall were shrubs with dark green leaves and white blossoms. The flowers stirred. Like paper torn in squares, a cloud of butterflies floated above our heads. Blown by the breeze, the butterflies drifted away. I settled into my pillow, picked up my tea, and took a sip. Framed by rock walls, far down the canyon a persimmon sun hung above an indigo stream. Life's deepest joy came from moments such as this, the small adventures.

JANE SAVAGE

Your Heart, Praise God

I wish I could visit your heart like a museum,
pry open your sternum
with my hands,
exposing the bumbum bumbum
shining and red and pulsing
with your life.

I'd knock gently with a fingertip,
wherein you'd welcome me.
Through sinews,
sliding down the aorta,
veering around the vena cava,
trekking over the mountain tops of the atrium
and entering the pulmonary artery.
Swoosh
into the vacuum of your right ventricle,
down, down, down
into your hungry depths,
the pressure pounding in my own blue veins,
into the Tunnel of Approach.
Bright, bright distant lights
casting shadows on the scarlet cavern walls.

There's your mom at the entrance
wearing that same outfit your remember
by the kitchen sink, in front of her sewing machine.

There's your father bearing his Bible
to Sunday school and brown bags of groceries.

Your brothers near him, years ago outside,
the stick stuck through Samuel's cheek,
the three of you watching evening TV.

Nana cooking dinner and cookies in the oven,
Grandy still sitting in his ancient stoic chair.

There are JB, Barrett, and Michael
on the shiny tiled floors of your high school,
drinking vodka in the woods
and on couches in the basement.

There are Ryan and Caroline
on their wedding day,
white-dressed and tuxedo-adorned, rejoicing
on the steps of the red brick Baptist chapel.

The girls you loved before me
standing shyly in the corner.

And there's our church,
a human chain
draped on either side of your heart aisle
for miles.

Then I see myself
in a wool hat at sunrise.

But shortly after I realize the light's
grown much too bright.
Tiny infinite shards of
absolute fluorescent perception.

And with further approach impossible
I seek desperately to squint against the
glare but catch only a glimpse of
them.

Amen.

AMY SNYDER

La Carpio: A Refugee Camp, San José, Costa Rica

This is La Carpio:
Plywood, metal, and mortar
rising haphazard from the dust,
hemmed on three sides
by a trash dump:
the moat, protecting San José
from the refugees, Nicaragüenses.
This is La Carpio.
Shacks and cinder-block cages
with children, slender children,
playing in the dust, in the doorway.
A bottle three weeks shattered—
dulled pieces glistening in the dirt.
Little sister holding smaller brother,
soothing tears drawn by broken glass.
This is La Carpio.
Avivamiento—steel beams, gray blocks—
a little church, standing
in the corner of this town within a town.
This is La Carpio:
Rock and dirt, brown chalk-smudge,
behind a red hibiscus
clinging to a barbwire fence.
This is La Carpio.

CHELSEA USHER

Happy Birthday

For most people, the twentieth birthday is fairly uneventful. It isn't a milestone birthday, but you can usually weasel a meal and some cake out of it. If nothing else, it's a great excuse to hang out with friends. My twentieth birthday this past July was no different, unless of course you count spending multiple hours searching a compost facility for a body something different.

We drove up to the Sevier County Solid Waste Compost Plant and were met by a police officer with a clipboard. At the moment, the plant was a crime scene, which meant she had to record exactly who came and went.

We're with the Search and Rescue team.

Names? In typical fashion, Roy decided to be sarcastic.

Roy Ferguson, Suzie Ferguson, Chelsea Usher, Schatzie, and Apache. The officer stopped writing and shot a quizzical glance at Roy. *Well, you wanted everybody, right? I mean, they are the brains of the operation.* The officer was only slightly amused.

Drive on through. The other guy is parked right over there. She pointed to a silver SUV.

We parked in a partially shaded loading dock. To our right, I could see through an open doorway into a large warehouse. The sign had clearly said "compost," but this wasn't your grandmother's kitchen scraps. Mounds of what I considered pure garbage were piled twenty feet high. Of the 375 tons of garbage the plant received daily, anything organic was directed towards the composting section. Soon, they would be pushed into the open composting tubes in the floor behind them. I opened the door and stepped out. I thought back to my grandfather's stories. A hundred degrees in the shade, he'd say. I hadn't believed that was possible until now. It wasn't yet noon, but according to the radio, it was already over 100 degrees. The sickening stench of the plant hung in the air. It was like sticking your face into a garbage can that hadn't been emptied in two weeks. I looked down and thought back to a project in elementary school when we used lint to make paper. The ground appeared to be covered in an art project gone wrong, albeit a very odiferous art project. I pushed at a pile of the grey gunk with my shoe wondering how so many different items all came out looking

the same. To my left, the warehouse continued for several hundred feet. Separated from the main warehouse by a small road, a smaller warehouse stood in the distance. Apache jumped out of the truck, nearly knocking me over.

The excited German Shepherd anxiously looked from back and forth from the warehouse to Roy. He was ready to work. His nose surveyed the air, bringing a myriad of repulsive, and yet exciting odors. Roy slipped the orange harness over his head, the bright orange in stark contrast to his dark amber and black markings. As I stepped away from the door, Schatzie daintily leapt out of the truck. Lighter in color and smaller in size, Schatzie's slender frame makes her easily distinguishable from Apache. A few sniffs later, her ears were back towards her skull. Clearly, the stench was far beneath the older, wiser shepherd.

Suzie, look! Look at her ears! Roy began to giggle. Though probably a hair over six feet and sixty, he often giggles like a child. When he smiles, it reaches ear to ear and when he laughs, it's impossible to keep a straight face. Schatzie looked up at him as she slinked forward. If looks could kill, Roy would have been cold before he hit the ground.

Suzie, though laughing, attempted to console the distressed shepherd and fastened the harness around Schatzie's chest. Ordinarily more serious of the two, though still fun loving, Suzie has an air of independence about her. Her brown wavy, shoulder length hair was pulled back and she, like Roy, was decked out in search and rescue gear: black army boots, cargo pants and an SAR polo.

Halfway to the silver SUV, we were met by their team member, Brian, and his shepherd Lexi. He began to explain his search pattern and where he hoped Roy and Suzie would search. Somewhere in the middle of his speech, as I took in my surroundings, I wondered how on Earth I'd ended up at a compost facility, looking for a body.

That morning had begun the same as the morning before with a wake-up call from the 80 pound, not quite 2-year-old Apache. When I heard the door to my room creak open, I pretended to be soundly asleep. That only prompted him to jump onto the bed and sit on me. Fortunately for him, the innocence in his expression coupled with big brown eyes and a strategically timed head tilt kept him out of trouble.

It was my twentieth birthday. Not a milestone by any means, but I was looking forward to another relaxing day visiting with Roy and Suzie. Residents of Sevierville, Tennessee, the Fergusons had been instrumental in

my senior project, a children's book about puppy raising for Leader Dogs for the Blind. We'd become good friends, and every summer since then, I'd jumped the North Carolina/Tennessee border to spend a weekend with them and participate in Search and Rescue training. By participate, I mean they'd hand me a walkie-talkie, point me towards the woods and say "get lost." I was a pro.

While these dogs can be trained to find the living on land, they can also be certified to find the dead on land or in water. The smell produced by human remains is distinct, and with an olfactory center several times the size of our own, dogs are able to pick out this scent from something as small as a drop of blood. Even if a body has been buried in a forest for a decade, the dogs can still pick up the smell in the leaves of the tress which have been feeding off of the nutrients within the remains.

Suzie and I were at the grocery store that morning picking out a birthday cake when Roy called. A man had gone missing from his workplace, the compost facility, on Friday. They now suspected he'd fallen into one of the composting tubes and hoped the dogs could confirm or deny their suspicions.

According to the police, the man, a fifty-four year old white male, was last seen in the break room, so we grabbed a few water bottles and headed across the lot. The break room was actually inside the smaller warehouse which housed recyclable cardboard. Even the cardboard reeked. Mountains of stained and ripped cardboard covered the cement floor.

Let's start in the break room. Roy handed me Apache's leash. *You wait out here with him.* Their teammate Brian also handed me his dog's leash and the three of them stepped into the break room. Apache, Lexi, and I stood outside the door of the warehouse sweating in the sun, batting away flies. Only one dog can work at a time. They're likely to distract each other and it keeps them from cheating off each other. Cadaver dogs only want one thing: their reward. If they don't find a body, they don't get their reward. Ergo, if Apache were to see Schatzie alert in the break room, he might be tempted to follow suit in order to get the coveted towel tug-toy.

Suzie emerged from the break room, followed by the men.

Nothing. You can sit with those two in the break room in the air condition and we'll search the rest of the warehouse. I called the dogs and we all piled into the small, dank break room. To the casual observer, it may have seemed absurd to search an area no bigger than a dorm room with a cadaver dog. Clearly, if the body were there, it would have been more

than apparent. But Schatzie hadn't been sent to look for a body; she was looking for bodily fluids, or trace evidence. Had our missing man been the victim of foul play and had he been struck with an object in this room, the dogs would have found it. I amused myself by examining every inch of the room, pretending to look for clues. The man's hard hat still sat on the table, yellow and dented. A bulletin board hung on one wall. It was covered with announcements about payroll changes and shift policies. The concrete floor was cracked and a single file line of ants ran from one wall to a Cheeto left on the floor. Apache lay watching the ants, occasionally sniffing with too much force, disrupting the line and sending the little ants rolling. Lexi had situated herself on the other side of the room by the water cooler.

The door opened. Schatzie trotted in and Roy stuck his head in the door.

Apache, come. The shepherd jumped to his feet.

Find something?

Maybe. Schatzie alerted twice so we'll see what he does. The door shut.

Several minutes later, the process was repeated. Apache was returned and Lexi was taken into the warehouse. When the group returned, they had more questions than answers.

Well, they all hit on the same pile of cardboard, but when we got someone to move it, there wasn't anything there. Roy sat down across from me, face dripping with sweat. *There's no way of knowing what they smell. Some guy could have had a nose bleed as he was stacking the cardboard, or if that guy got chopped up in the machine and spit out the other side, some rat could have brought a bone from his finger into the warehouse.*

That's lovely. I cringed.

Over the next few minutes, while everyone recuperated from the heat, we came up with a variety of possibilities worth of CSI.

What if he was messing around with some guy's wife and they got into it in here. He could have hit him, stashed the body out in the warehouse and then gotten rid of it after hours! Suzie was convinced someone had done him in.

Nah, he probably just ran away with a mistress and didn't want to fess up so he just went missing. Roy piped in, chuckling. Though we were all laughing, I couldn't help wondering why. The latter was the best case scenario; all the others had him dead by foul play. In the end, we agreed the police probably had it right to begin with: an ill-timed heart attack which sent him tumbling into the tube.

When everyone had rehydrated, we decided to walk back to the main building. We were laughing as we turned the corner into the main lot, but then we saw them.

That's his family. They were here yesterday, too, Brian said. What had been a casual moment suddenly became tense. I dropped my head and watched the pavement pass under my feet. I glanced up once and saw a teenage girl holding an older woman. I dropped my gaze again. I looked down at my red Gardner-Webb Dawg Pound t-shirt. I didn't look like I belonged with the K-9 unit. Were they wondering why this college kid had invaded this matter that was so personal to them? I couldn't imagine what they were going through, or how hard it must have been for them to watch us walk across the lot.

I breathed a sigh of relief as we reached the far warehouse, mostly out of sight of the grieving family. I realized then why only ten minutes before, we'd been joking about the situation: we were coping. To work objectively, we couldn't admit that we were there because Bobby Reagan was presumed dead. Ordinarily, the team works in remote areas and sees little of the victim's family. This time, it was different.

As we stood by the door to the warehouse, we formulated a new plan. Brian would go behind the building and work the surrounding area, while Roy and Suzie would work inside. I was the designated dog sitter. I would sit with one dog in the shade of the fire truck on the other side of the lot as far from the stench as humanly possible, and Roy and Suzie would work with the other. About every twenty minutes, the dogs were rotated. I continued to sit in the grass and talk with three of the firemen, all who were very interested in how the dogs worked.

After an hour and a half of this routine, Roy and Suzie emerged and called me over to the warehouse door.

Find him?

No. Both dogs are really interested in the same spot, but neither one will alert. Apache actually wants to go inside the tube. To make a formal alert, the dogs must sit. Anything less is merely labeled as interest. As they were discussing the next course of action, one of the firemen called out that they'd found him. Rescue workers inside the compost tube had located the body. For a moment, no one moved. Why hadn't the dogs found him?

We were discussing what went wrong when Brian returned with his dog.

Try again. Roy turned to look at him.

Why?

They change the air flow. When the HAZMAT team went in this morning they tried to make it easier on them by pushing air through the tube to the outside. They've turned it off now. Cadaver dogs are good, but when the scent is being forced the opposite direction, it creates confusion. So, though soaked through with sweat and exhausted, they decided to give it another try. This time, I sat with Apache just outside the door. I watched as Suzie led Schatzie through the steps again, searching every crevice. When they returned, Roy was smiling.

Yep, she got it! He grabbed Apache's leash and walked into the building. Schatzie melted into the pavement beside me. Again, Roy returned with a smile.

He got it, too, although he was a little confused to begin with. He's never had to alert to a target that far away before. I thought back to the training sessions I'd sat in on the previous summer. The sample was never more than four feet from where the dog could sit down. This time, the body was about seventy five feet down a tube filled with garbage. That tends to make things a little difficult.

When we got home, we immediately bathed the dogs for fear they'd stepped in something corrosive in the plant. We then shed as many layers as possible and scrubbed our boots relentlessly. That wasn't a smell we wanted to stick around. By that time, we'd already gotten word from the rescue workers that the heart attack scenario was looking more and more likely. After we'd all had a chance to shower and eat a late lunch, I sat down to call my Mom.

Happy birthday! She sang into the phone. *So what did you guys do today?*

I laughed. *You're never going to believe this one.*

JEFFREY ALFIER

Torre Canne, Once a Fishing Village

At night, boats moored along Via Del Mare
rock in the swelling surf like fitful dreamers.

Once more a fisherman drops in weariness
beside his wife. From their bedroom window

she watches lightning skein the Adriatic
as though in grievance with errant ships.

She knows her husband's hands were flawless
once, unburned by rope or salt, but redeemed

by the toil sleep secures him from. At first light
she'll release him to the sea, as dark as it is.

PETER BERGQUIST

The Easy Winter

Snow feathers down
and fills suburban woods with white.
Day and night fat flakes drift
through streetlights' yellow aureoles,
float onto tongues and melt,
first dry, then wet.

No school all week.
Tailpipes smoking, cars in chains
creep up the steep to Council Crest.
We straddle sleds,
snatch back bumpers,
stealing lifts.

Long we stare
at slippery hard death below,
at last lie flat,
push off and plunge,
red-faced, tear-streaked,
screams steaming in the bite of air.

JAN BOTTIGLIERI

Migratory

Late September. Leaves scutter, then the first call
of the Canada geese—the necessary noise
of fall, the squall of creatures who would rather be
elsewhere. At the sound I gaze up: gauge their southness
against sunset, watch as two dozen or so point the arrow

of their array to a more temperate place
of memory. The flock passes over so low I count
the black webs of feet pressed back, the speckles of down
on rounded breasts; and the stretched throats,
for one moment, hush: only then I hear

the under-sound that must be
always there, a steady *whoosh-shwoosh*
woosh-shwoosh of drafting wingbeat, each stroke pushing
downward on the cushioned air, treading
sky. It is a strange recycling:

how nature can borrow a sound – say,
the deepwater revelation of my then-unborn son's heart
learning its rhythm, a sound I last heard on sonogram
some twenty-one autumns ago – and let it drift
now from the blushed sky, borne earthward
by the dark press of wings.

BILL BROWN

Flying

We boarded the john boat to explore
the myriad collage of river—light, water,
wind, birds, smell of dead fish, and broken
mussel shells, their mother of pearl
bejeweled along the river's edge.

Great stone bluffs above the far shore
held my grandmother's stories of caves,
rattlesnakes, and the dead, always the dead,
and how the bluffs were willed to spirits
that chose to stay. This is what my thoughts
turned to—mysteries that shaped questions
a small boy might ask: why would hunters
take refuge in a cave filled with serpents,
why would Indians chase a young woman
off a cliff? And what if a boy staring down
from the high bluff leapt from his brother's arms,
and for a moment knew what the woman knew
before she was broken on the rocky shore?

Perhaps that night a tolerant God let him
dream of flying, even soaring above trees
to reach for the sun, before the quick heart-
fall into, not the river, nor the shore, but
the cabin floor beneath the bunk bed,
his knees scrapped, cheeks bruised blue,
his pulse too desperate for words.

MARJORIE BRUHMULLER

Concussion

The robin's flight
ended abruptly
at our kitchen window

His limp body
a moored boat
in the waves of grass

His eyes, off somewhere
in a red-breasted dream,
tilting his head to the perfect worm

watching his robust self
dip innately to peck it out
with his quick beak

And when I propped him up
he thought he felt himself
jab the damp earth—

But as he blinked awake
he saw me kneeling close
felt the weight of his body shift

then he leapt
back into the world
glad of his escape.

MATTHEW BURNS

Street Confusion

All the way down Main
this morning, toward the store
for a paper and apples,
every light was red.

Let me be forgiven
for running them all
just to watch the lone crow
that flew in front of me
for ten blocks.

And the fingers of its wings
never moved, just lay splayed
out to shape the wind that blew
us east beside the low river
that is already beginning to stink.

For surety of the black beak
I have forsaken the stop signs
and trees half-wrapped in tinsel
shivering back to last Christmas,
I have renounced the used-car lots
where the same nine trucks have sat,
for as long as I can remember,
getting cheaper every year.

And I think I'm learning
how to be sorry, old town,
for every crack I've made
about those trucks and rust,
for the crumbs of pity I heap
on your broke-down rent-to-own
and dollar stores, and especially
for the splash of laughter

in your bars and Sunday-morning
puddles someone left there
the night before
in a little circle of themselves
returning to these streets.

Streets, forgive me and hold me
as the wind holds the crow
whose feet hide folded,
whose beak leads east,
whose wings do not flap
when the morning dapple
of light at every corner
runs over its dark
dark-blue back
like absolution.

BEN E. CAMPBELL

Cornstalk

I've got this silence problem, it's about to drive me mad. My wife instituted it a couple years ago, out of the blue, with no apparent warning. At least there was none that I remember. Her last spoken words to me were "flush the damn toilet"! This is not to say we still don't communicate. She has these post-it notes, they are everywhere. On the refrigerator, across the mirrors—I find them inside my clothes sometimes when I put them in the wash. "Feed the dog" they say, or "wipe that sauce off your chin." This isn't the life I pictured. When I ask her how we got here, she writes that I never speak with substance. The day I say something worth responding to is the day she cans the notes. All I can say is that I hope I keep my marbles.

Some couples have work lives to talk about when they've hit a patch like ours, something to get the wheels spinning toward pseudo conversation. We don't. Ellen, my wife, she's a scholar in making, spends a lot of time doing research. She researches, writes, then researches even more. Sometimes it makes her happy. Myself, it doesn't matter. As a jack of all trades, master to none, whatever keeps the bills paid suits me perfect. Currently it's sanitation, as in garbage removal. I ride the truck picking up bags.

It keeps my senses fresh. Ellen disapproves of this. When I first told her about getting the job, she scribbled up a frenzy. She must have burned through two packs of post-its. The first one said "I can't believe you would do this to me."

"What?" I responded. "You can't believe I would feed you? Keep you stocked in pens and post-its?"

"Humiliate me," she wrote.

I wanted to ball it up, throw it at the t.v. then run and kick the dog. But that was getting old, so instead I tried my charm. "Look, baby, if you're worried about those highfalutin buddies of yours..."

"Spare me," her fast fingers blazed. "This isn't the progress you promised. The growth I deserve."

"I've grown so much that my head can hit the ceiling. How much more could you possibly want?"

She paused a moment, then scrawled another note and flung it at my feet. It read: "The fact you have to ask tells me more than you'll ever know."

There was a lot more penned and said that day, but it was mostly gibberish. The same song and dance that makes me miss our once-good past.

You see, a long time back, when we were two average people living out love in our hometown of Buford, South Carolina, Ellen got an Associate's degree that ended up leading us all over, from Columbia to Little Rock to Lexington to here, Huntington, West Virginia, home of Marshall University and the storied Thundering Herd football program, where the old gal's taking one more for the wall collection. Huntington is also renowned for its fat people, which means my spare tire doesn't stick out so bad as it once did. Ride the back of a garbage truck on a frosty winter morn and like any Antarctic animal, you come to value the extra pounds. I can't really say I feel the same about extra degrees. There was this secretary once, met her at a house party, and she said that one Ph.D. was all my wife really needed. Ellen going for two was like she thought herself too smart or something. I must confess that I hold the same opinion.

Don't get me wrong on this. I can appreciate knowledge as much as the next man.

Those Modernist writers with all their drinking and killing themselves, they were something let me tell you. Plenty of important stuff to be learned from that bunch. But given my subpar lineage—one that includes a jailbird for a father and a barfly for a mom—well, the fact is there's only so far this mind can take me before the train runs out of track. Even so, Lord knows I've tried to follow. Once, when there was all this research spread about, enough books and articles to crowd a small landfill, I volunteered my help.

Give the wife a hand, I said. Maybe find those missing keys. The remote was lost as well.

I announced my intentions as I probed the cluttered room. Ellen gave me her faithless look.

"You'll only get in the way," those nimble fingers scratched. "Mess things up."

"No more than usual," I said. "Besides, I want to help."

She jotted: "But how would you know what to look for?"

"It's me, baby. The man who can sniff a coon out of a fox hole."

"Well..." she inked, her dots after the word all big and hopefully round. "I guess we can give it a try."

After a ten-minute lecture on the ground rules, like how I couldn't actually read the stuff I was searching, she put me to scouting journals.

Anything said Post Colonial I flagged it. I hunted those words like a Bushman in the mountains. They couldn't escape me I tell you. Red, yellow—it didn't matter what color the highlighter, I marked them with a force. I was like some kind of caveman bringing the goods home to his girl.

Best of all, Ellen seemed impressed. She wrote as much on a post-it. "I'm impressed," it said. In two days' time I had gone through all her piles, probably saved her two full weeks. I swear, with all that help I'd provided, there was a change coming on for sure. I could feel it inside our trailer's walls. And then it happened. She walked through the door unexpected one night and her red hair was fixed up instead of pulled back, she had lipstick on, I could even smell perfume. Man, you talk about a sight now. And when she cleared her throat, as if she were set to actually talk, well, I can't even put into words what a feeling that was mine.

But, as tends to be the case with most matters in my life, a good thing never lasts.

Ellen had this nudie mag among her scholarly stuff, National Geographic I think it was called, and inside it I found these booby pictures, page after page of African woman parts, their ends all pierced and rounded, perfect in booby form. It was too much for a man so deprived. I had it open atop my lap. It was sitting there as she leaned in close to speak.

"I think I might have come across something..." I started.

She didn't even flinch. With an eerie kind of calm, she went off to the kitchen, got out the ketchup, then sprayed PIG across my shirt. In the old days she would have laughed.

There'd have been jokes about it. "My husband's such a perv," she would have said, then pulled me hard atop her as we ripped each other's clothes. But not now. Miscues such as these have become the fabric of our marriage.

Maybe what we need is a mess of real-life troubles. I could see this if there'd been an affair, or if I couldn't knock her up, but these aren't our problems. Never have been. I guess I mostly bore her. Divorce isn't an option, what with us both raised Southern Baptist. I know that doesn't mean what it used to, but it still means something to us. Maybe less to her. I don't really know some days.

I don't really know why I'm sharing all of this as well. It makes me feel like I'm a sissy. This entire ordeal's beginning to suck. Curses to it all, I say! Curses to the whole damn lot!

Be what it may, my job really ain't so bad. You put in your eight then call it merry quits. No researching and writing to do into the late hours of

the night. Plus there's never any dull moments like the ones I face at home. My first day on I had this driver with a horse's face, he pulled into a bank line and whipped out his dong, shook it like a ferret. The teller, having never looked up, asked, "Can I help you?", and when she did he said, "Yeah, I'd like to deposit this, please." It got us in a bind, the cops had us pulled within a block or so, arrested ol' horse face on the spot, but I knew right then I had stumbled upon a gem.

Guy who drives me now has a stump arm from a sawmill slip. Goes by the initials A.J., after the local Confederate legend Albert Jenkins, for whom he and one of the university buildings are named. He's a good enough guy. Drinks a little more than he should, has the temper of a louse, but once you get past that and the foot-long beard he sports you find a true lover of life.

Don't ask me how, but the man can fucking drive! He knows this city like a bum, can downshift faster than a full-armer. I wish I rode the cab sometimes just to watch that stump at work. In the end it's best I don't. We've got a good thing going, him manning the control seat, me slinging those burly bags. We finish our routes in half the given time.

With what's left we often raise a little hell. I toss empty beer bottles at trash cans, knock them over, listen to everything go CLANG, CLANG, CLANG. I have to deal with the boss when I get back to the shop, the housewives always complain, but it's worth it. To hear noise is golden my friends. The whole world should be so lucky as to be filled with nonstop noise.

Better than this is the game we made. We call it waste toss. It's a lot like Cannonball, that 70s movie where contestants got points for each person they struck. We don't let things go that far, though there's some folks on that campus I wouldn't mind snuffing, to tell it truthful. No. Instead we hit street people with fruit. Lots and lots of rotten, thrown-out fruit. The rules they go like this: A head shot gets you twenty, crotch shot ten, backside five. Points for lawyers double. Add four if you nail a nun. And just like any other game, honor rules apply, like geezers have immunity and one must never hit a cop. It can get complicated. That's why we keep a scorecard in the truck. Up until a month ago, A.J. held the lead. He was crushing me, sticking all these head shots on frat boys, popping lawyers between the nuts. Robbing men of kids and smarts. I didn't think I would ever catch up.

But then my break came. That's what happens sometimes when you ride a thing out.

We were out by the park, cruising the nerd strip, raiding professors' homes. Locals call this stretch faculty row. Ellen calls it the place she wants

to move to. She cannot find inspiration, she says, from a trailer park's view. I know one thing she could find on the nerd strip—plenty of waste toss points. On that golden day of my comeback the motherload appeared before me. It was the president, out grabbing his morning paper.

He was all presidential looking with his suit on and his wire-rimmed glasses and a brief case in his hands. He was just asking to get struck! I got off two pears with one throw—nearly fell from off the truck—but the risk was well worth it. One head shot, one groin, a former frat boy in college and a lawyer by trade. Man, you talk about wracking up. The old boy flipped the bird at us, which wasn't too presidential acting, really, but the damage was clearly done. With that many points scored at once I haven't come close to looking back.

A.J. keeps fighting though. He'll sling those oranges and apples until his arm falls off, or the doctors have to take that one as well. He's just like that. We both are. In fact, there's something to be said about people like us. We have cajones the size of bowling balls. You couldn't muzzle us if you tried.

I only wish I could share my luck with my wife. Most folks appreciate a man who makes a comeback like that, but Ellen probably wouldn't. She's just a downer that way. It's no coincidence that we don't have much to talk about, or say, for that matter.

I've got this thing going out in the yard. I don't know what you call it really. A monument, perhaps? Maybe a sculpture? It stands close to twelve feet tall and is made of tossed-out junk. I saw something like it once down in Tampa, when me and the old man went sea fishing off Florida's coast. This guy had a totem pole-like thing built from bicycle parts. Stood as erect as a penis. My thing's more diverse. There are couches, car radiators, you name it it's tucked there. I call it Cornstalk, after the Shawnee Indian legend. He once lived in these parts, acted a thorn in the colonial peoples' sides.

If it seems a little strange that I know this, it really isn't. This is what I do when we move to college towns. I study local folklore, learn things, like how this Cornstalk put a curse on the region's land. He wanted to make life hard on people, pay them back for his untimely death. Mention his name and there are some who raise their brows. So far no one's said much about my own Cornstalk, like "clean that up" or "why's the garbage man bringing home his work?" These Appalachian folks don't care what you do so long as you don't disrespect the name of Christ or burn the flag or engage in any devil worship.

I did get a hippie from the campus come out and look it over. He wore dark-rimmed glasses and a sports coat with the elbows patched. Someone he worked with had told him about it, someone had driven by and seen it from off the highway. The hippy took lots of pictures. He said he was intrigued by my expression. He threw questions at me like “where did I find my muse”, “who were my inspirations”—“why the trampoline on top?” They were mostly nonsense. It was like he didn’t even speak to me at all.

Most disappointing is my wife’s silence. I built it just for her. I wanted to curse her lips to speech. I figured something like that might loosen her up a bit, knock the rust off about her mouth, but to date I’ve had no such luck. Not even a pen scratch. I caught her looking at it once, she had a finger on her chin and was making all these facial gestures, but all she did in the end was pull a book from off the pile and go about her business. Oh, she’s smooth like that. She’s got a curse shield or something. It’s like throwing a boomerang at her. I don’t even think Cornstalk himself could have worked voodoo on this one.

Maybe it’s me who took the curse. Some days I think as much, when I look back on our old life, the one we had before the book smarts came between us. There were all these good times, these hours filled with greatness. Like the time Ellen wanted to skinny dip off the shores of Fort Sumter. Here were all these people watching, a hundred tourists probably, and my wife just shed it. Got as naked as a jaybird. I bring that one up a lot, that image of her. It gets me through the rough days. I don’t even have to remember that shortly after that’s when she gave me the we-can-have-so-much-more-than-this speech.

Oh, but what’s a man to do? I might just build my Cornstalk up and climb it to the moon. You’d be surprised at what the shitheads of the modern world will throw away. It might just be possible to do such a thing. And where would Ellen be then? How long could she go without her post-its? Just who else would be willing to read those scribbled words?

A man shouldn’t have to go to such lengths just to hear his wife’s voice. Not in the ways I have. It’s downright brutal at times.

Like a couple semesters ago when I went to this conference on campus. Ellen was supposed to read from one of her papers, something to do with contextualizing contextualization. All I wanted was to blend like a chameleon and catch a few soft words. But success would not amuse me. Some goober before her got to going at it, babbling on about The Simpsons, how this character’s actions stood for that, and how so and so’s dialogue really meant this. The guy went on until his face was red and there was no

more time for speaking. I thought about rushing the microphone, but then some British-looking woman beat me to it. They'd be breaking for snacks, she announced, with a lecture on Lovecraft to follow.

I pulled my hat down and watched the growing circus. People were drinking and putting hands on their hips, touching fellow peoples' shoulders. I caught sight of Ellen in a corner. She was chatting with her boss, the department chair, this pansy with parted hair and a pansy-perfect beard. They were going at it let me tell you. She was talking to him in a way she hadn't with me for years. Her head kept bouncing up and down and there was spit all over her lips, I tell you you couldn't have shut that yapper of hers with a bear trap. And him. I watched him too. The chair. I watched him watch those boobies, the way that supple flesh jiggled with booby perkiness. I wanted to punch my whole arm down his throat. I wanted to throw a bunch of books at his feet and set them on fire. But all I could do really was hang back in the shadows and pick my perfect point.

The night wore on, the fruit cakes chattering as they gorged on wine and cheese.

Eventually Ellen got tipsy enough that I went up to her and led her out the room. The hallway was vacant. Only a drunk Asian guy staggered around the stair steps. I squeezed her by the arm.

"This place is corrupting you," I said. "You're slowly decaying."

She took a pen from out her bra and scribbled across my arm. "I like it when you talk Marxist to me."

"Enough with the big words, Ellen. These upper crusts have got you brainwashed."

"Take me home," she wrote. "Now! Before I change my mind!"

The car ride was maddening, the first few minutes home even worse. When finally we got it going—our bodies tangled in a rope of moans and groans—she came up off some words. My head was in the pillow, I can't say that I heard them as they were said, but I think she called me Bruce, as in Bruce the department chair boss. It was him panting like a race horse over top of her instead of me then. I damn near started to cry, but what can I say? You take what you can get.

Of course, I didn't exactly forget it. She couldn't get me to pick my socks up for a month or two thereafter. And I didn't let that chair fellow off the hook either. A.J. suggested I drop a load in the man's El Camino, but I couldn't, really. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to look at an El Camino in the same light again. Instead I got him at his home. I sliced open his garbage bags for weeks, spread the contents around his yard.

Made it look like some St. Bernard had paid him visits. It nearly blew me over some of the things I found in those bags: adult diapers, porno mags...a horse's head, the bloody parts still hanging from off its neck. Let your neighbors have a gander at that, I thought. They won't stand for no devil worshiper the likes of you.

Turns out them academic types ain't so dumb as you think. Old boy put up a video camera and caught me in the act. I had to watch it at the police station. It all made Ellen embarrassed. I thought she was going to catch the carpal tunnel she cranked out so many notes. Then one day, out of the blue again, she looked at me with this kind of disgusted face and said, in clear, plain English: "The greatest question in life for me is how I ever got connected with a loser the likes of you!"

Needless to say, it was me who got quiet after that. I probably didn't spill ten words the next two months. A.J. took me to the dirt track once, we spoke a little about Nascar, but that got wronged as well. Fate would have it he's a Johnson fan. Me—if it ain't about an Earnhardt then I don't want to hear it. Let the pretty boys stick to teaching I say. I pretty much stuck to Cornstalk then, built him up some, kept wishing he hadn't actually worked.

At least I wasn't the only one to stop talking. November rolled around and the whole town got bent on silence. They had this nightmare to remember, how in 1971 the football team lost seventy-six members and supporters in a plane crash. Thirty some years later it's like that day has never stopped. I passed people on the street, they had tears in their eyes, there were memorial services. I can't even go into how sad affairs were on that campus. A.J. and I suspended waste toss for the entire month. It was tragic stuff I tell you.

In due time though the mood leveled out. Christmas came on, there were happenings in the area. Chad Pennington got the Dolphins turned around. Hell, even I got chippy for a minute and asked my wife out on a date. It was sort of my way of saying sorry for all I'd done. To my surprise, Ellen accepted. She dolled herself up good, so I pulled out all the stunts, took her to the Cracker Barrel and bought this big ol' spread. Things were going marvelous I tell you. There were smiles between us and eye contact, I even saw this aura about her face. But then our jerk waitress had to go and ruin it all. She kept screwing up our order, and when she brought me the wrong food for the third time—a beef side instead of sausage—I threw down some jellies and stomped them on the floor, smeared them with my boot. My payback left Ellen unimpressed. She took out a post-it and wrote as calmly as she could, "for each step forward you take two steps back."

Oh, it's not easy living in these shoes of mine. I hear voices all around me, they chirp out loads of nonsense. Trash makers and art folks and scholarly types—their all the same with their madness. Out of all those smart people Ellen buys into, there is only one who ever said anything worth listening to—that silence is deafening. Silence of the real kind, that is. But that's okay, 'cause one of these days I'm going to hold my hands to my ears and scream to them all, "Quiet! Curses to you all! Can't you see I'm busy? Can't you see I'm listening, that I'm listening for that one true voice?"

LAURA CARTER

The Poem

You have left me
in smallness:
I cut
a fine figure
out of misery
and stop
for a moment.
Someone rustles the
curtains again.
I want trouble
to give me something to say here.
I iron-brand
your hand to my hip.

KEVIN MARSHALL CHOPSON

Desert Lies

The desert lies.

It tells stories
with good intention

but the narrative is flat,
the cool night a ruse.

It presents hope
as an oasis
on the horizon –

unobtainable.

TOBI COGSWELL

The Fraternity of Bagram

He misses women.
The smell of his mother's kitchen.
The heat of the shower
thickening the hallway air.

He misses his sisters,
arguing about the phone
and pink eye shadow.
Their sound as they tease him

about all the things in their world,
familiar yet unknown, a puzzle
still looking for the last piece
that names him a man.

There are only boys here.
Age does not make you grown
and fear makes you small.
He wants to breathe easy

and safe. He wants the same
for the others around him.
They simply watch the calendar,
count one more day of not being

home, become numb to the smell
of ancient dust and burned skin,
and stop writing letters. A lifetime
of stories singed deeply within,

a shared and relentless knowing.
He misses the women who will hold him,
let his words bubble to the surface
and drift away, and save his life.

EMILY CORNISH

The Night Before

Night, they hear the hiss of water
erupting from the rust blooming pipe
beneath the bathroom sink. Nature's fury in the house.
The father and son spring from their beds,

unhurried wool socks breach the flood. In the dark
the water droplets on the walls are caught up in
the moon's luster. The father flicks on the light.
The tiled floor is a kaleidoscope of color

obscured, cinnabar rushing into blue at the son's feet.
Right now it is a matter of finding the right tools.
Later on when the father is back in his own bed
he remembers a small boy clutching the silver wrench

in his small hands, trying to tighten the exact bolt
that burst beneath the sink. Tomorrow they start
driving for a shock of woods and words
with a university nestled between.

THOMAS RAIN CROWE

Fall in Big Cataloochee Valley 2010 / An Ecology
for Wayne Caldwell

For a hundred and fifty years
only one road out of 'Big Catalooch,'
dug by hand. Built on buffalo trails
that crawl like a blacksnake on a rough-cut wall
up Half Acre Ridge to Cove Creek Gap.

In the valley the small elk herds graze
side by side with turkey and crows.
Sharing fields that Caldwells cleared
on the bottoms 'long Shanty Branch.
Along Cataloochee Creek, the old church
and schoolhouse stand alone like widowed ghosts
with open doors that answer the bugling
of the bison-sized males like Sunday's bells.

How many Caldwells, Messers and Woodys lived here
hidden between these two old hills?
And how many elk, deer, bear and beaver
once called this place home?

We drive by now in large gas machines
looking for graves. Spoiling for a fight
and the crash of antlers from the rutting bulls.
Going where the history of humans
and the flora for ancient animals have forever been.
From what the hell these eyes have seen:
the subtle passing of the green.

SARA DAVIS

Leeward

Red barn on white hillside,
charcoal smoke rises,
lazy, from farmhouse chimney.

In nearby field
grackles scavenge stubble,
seeking enough from dearth.

Death and earth,
existence as we know it
sometimes in dark season.

Distantly a dog barks.
Startled starlings surge aloft,
a hopeful sign.

Warmed by the fire,
within brave, fragile walls,
a family waits for spring.

MICHAEL DOWDY

Moonwalking in Centerfield

When I moonwalked in centerfield
in the final inning of little league,
my uncle, the third base coach,
turned to the dugout's shoddy masonry,
stuck two fingers in his bulging jaw
and hurled a juicy fastball of tobacco
that hit the wall like a masticated meteor.
My attention span suffered the slow notes
of the pastime's music, its currency of calm
broken by explosions of aluminum
and the prehensile chatter of children
imitating big league idols or their fathers,
but for this pallid Prince of Pop
who, mid-spin, felt a grounder shoot
between his magic feet. As I made
the fence and spun toward the umpire,
my cousin, the skinned-kneed shortstop,
was sliding needlessly into home plate
like an acolyte of unthinking hustlers.

CYNTHIA SCHWARTZBERG EDLOW

Elk in the Night

Tangled pine trees kiss
the rim of the little lake.
Tiny rented cabin. Tiny
kitchen window. They step gingerly,
the courtly bustle of wild
turkeys. Speckled
waddling bottoms. People exist
who pay to track and kill one of these.
Some wait their entire lives to see
a turkey in the wild. The mere glimpse
of this parade would be to a hunter
a hallucination. Skittish fowl,
they won't be knocking asking for directions.

Just how does water make sound
come right to your ear with no effort?
In their tent across the lake, a couple, low-voiced—
Had one found the other's wool socks?
It has to be calm water though. Not oceanic.
Not Atlantic.

The crescent moon strings its effort across the late sky.
On the cabin porch, with only the dim
lantern bulb to outline the phantom,
some velvety gray bat-thing sideswipes my cheek.
It feels like cashmere.

Inside, the cabin floor burns cold like dry ice.
Human logs, we lay in the squat bed. Midnight
and with it all night until pre-dawn
a campus of elk seek togetherness, the shrill
urgent whistles bugling like Louis Prima's
insatiable horn section. The first hour
holds a base sexy turn-on for me.

Energizing, cosmic.

The second hour, to murder every elk
in that bizarre forest would be reasonable.

With the third, I am a stony vessel, I stare at the ceiling:
this is why camping is for animals only.

And so we fester until the country sun rolls up.

I have not been too many places in the world.

Swooping from pine to pine
the craziest-looking triangular-winged birds
finesse their glide. Some have feathers
an emerald you can't describe.

We rent the rowboat with the outboard motor.

Finally, we are the people trolling the water.

When the motor gets too robust for the shallow lake
we take to oars. I churn that boat

in goofy circles. His face wires up embarrassed tight
from my herky-jerky navigational maneuvers
and I laugh.

What! Are! You! Do! Ing!,

a man on a blanket with his sweetheart
hollers from the bank.

Right through the paddling, the docking
of the boat, dinner eaten, the perfect sunset fallen,
mutual exhausted collapse, I laugh. I love his face
screwed up like that. It's him I love.

I love this is our last night.

But of course the thankful, vengeful cabin bed.

And soon the delicious, sinister any-moment
of that first agonized elk

making its intentions, shall we say, overt,
in a vintage black night during which we,
as occurs more frequently now, are the unwelcome.

CLIFFORD PAUL FETTERS

His Turn

Those cold hands
with knuckles like
knots of sea rope
can hardly open.
Put them gently
(oh so gently)
in my hands,
let me hold them.

DENNIS DONOGHUE

Stones

One July morning on my way to work I was cut off by a guy driving an old gray BMW who forced me onto the shoulder. No sooner was I back in my lane when he came at me again, jabbing an index finger at the side of the road. His face, from what I could see of it, was twisted up at the cab of my pickup. When I didn't pull over, he slowed to a crawl in front of me. I blew the horn and nearly rear ended him. I didn't know who he was or why he was after me. When he applied the brakes and opened the door, I swung around him, my heart yanking at its mooring. At the next intersection I drove through a red light, certain he would kill me, and didn't slow down until I swung into a spot in the back corner of the lot between two SUVs.

The doors locked, I grabbed a plastic ice scrapper I found under the seat. When he didn't show I hurried inside, pausing only to blurt out the incident to a colleague drinking coffee in the break room. She mentioned a floppy beach hat in her trunk I could use as a disguise.

"You read about these things," she said. "They never turn out good."

I told her I'd already forgotten it. But I couldn't concentrate all day.

"There's a message for you," my wife Ruby said as soon as I stepped into the house. "A someone I didn't recognize. You owe him money for what you did to his car."

Her hair was pulled back from her face. The humidity and the kids had given her a headache three Tylenol couldn't dent. All day she'd waged a losing battle to stay hydrated. A tuna sandwich sat on the counter, wilted lettuce hiding the edge of the plate, a fistful of chips dumped on top.

"He ran my plate number," I said. "He knows people."

"All the drivers out there and he find you," she said. "Were you weaving again?"

She took the bag of hand-me-downs I'd had in my truck for a week. The house needed paint, the dogs heartworm pills, the grass a lawn mower which sat in the spot where the belt had snapped four days ago. The garden I'd planted to save money was dead from neglect because the kids hated vegetables and Ruby wouldn't eat anything touched by a bug. As she pulled out the clothes—snowsuits, a couple of sweaters, a bathrobe, a pair of pajamas—I picked up the scrap of paper with his number on it.

"This whole bag smells like smoke," she said. "Who can afford cigarettes? Want that sandwich?"

I had no appetite. The phone sat on its charger, waiting for me to pick it up.

"Promise me one thing," she said as she rubbed her temples where the hair was going gray. "Don't give him a cent, okay? The kids need more than what's in this bag. Summer won't last forever, thank God. But winter's another season we have to survive."

"Why would I give someone who tried to kill me money?"

"Because you defy logic."

On my first attempt to listen to the saved message I bungled the password. When I got it straight I heard a man named Edward Ward describe how stones dislodged from the bed of my truck had dinged his hood and cracked his windshield. He spoke without ambiguity. He'd had 20/20 vision since childhood.

"I anticipate hearing from you shortly," he said in a tone that suggested he had some leverage in the matter.

The kids bolted past me, headed for the plastic swimming pool from Wal-Mart I'd wedged into the truck bed a week ago. They were out the door without a hello or a goodbye, racing for a foot of water heating in the sun. Ruby snapped a fly swatter at the ceiling. She paused in her hunt to sip a glass of ice tea beading on the counter. She looked at me over the rim. What now? It was too hot to think, never mind make promises. I looked out the kitchen window into the backyard.

"You could drown in six inches of water," I said.

"Go then," she said. "Take the phone with you."

"How can I talk with this racket?"

"Do you have any idea what it's like with them all morning? I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy."

In the backyard I paced back and forth rehearsing my lines. The kids bent the side of the pool into a V. Water gushed onto the grass. The dogs barked at the water. One of the kids turned on the hose. Water went everywhere. It was five o'clock but no one had told the sun. If there were clouds, they were elsewhere. I yelled at the kids to keep the water in the pool. I yelled at the dogs to stop barking so I could hear myself think. For a moment I forgot why I had the phone in my hand. Then I remembered the gravel.

Two days before a bucket loader had dumped a ton of the stuff into my truck. Stones pelted the roof in a cloud of dust that billowed over the

windows. I had to release air from the tires so I could steer home. But I'd saved the \$25 delivery charge. For two hours, I filled holes in the driveway, pulling and pushing an iron rake until a smooth river of stones flowed to the street. Then I swept the bed clean, or so I thought.

In one hand I clutched the phone, in the other his number on damp paper. Years ago my landlord had chased down a gravel truck in his ten year old Eldorado, claiming stones shaken loose from the trailer had broken his windshield. Without hesitation the driver handed over his company's business card. When the check arrived, my landlord purchased a windshield for half the amount at a salvage yard to replace the one he'd cracked himself by pouring boiling water over it in an attempt to melt a coat of ice. To celebrate the windfall he and I finished a case of beer in a single afternoon. More than once we toasted the gravel company. What was the cost of a windshield to them?

Edward Ward picked up on the first ring. The stones, he insisted, careened too fast to avoid them. Like slugs from a gun, rat-tat-tat, they'd found the mark, half dozen or so decent-sized pieces. At contact, a spider web bloomed on the glass below the rearview mirror, inches from his face. Because his horn didn't work he'd had to get my attention somehow.

"I tracked them the whole way," he announced as if we were discussing tennis balls.

Three eighths of an inch, the size I'd ordered at the gravel yard, I wanted to clarify, though of course I didn't. He snorted when I suggested the stones could have come from anywhere.

"The world is covered in gravel," I reminded him.

"Some of which came bouncing out of your truck," he said.

"I could be dead right now," I said.

"My insurance doesn't cover glass," he said without addressing my accusation. "I found an aftermarket replacement windshield for half the price of a new one."

I didn't know what to make of his saving me the money I hadn't planned to give him.

"I'm sorry," I said right before I hung up. "It wasn't me."

I brought the phone inside. At the table Ruby snipped coupons from the newspaper circulars. Was it worth driving the distance to those stores or was she better off paying more locally to save gas? I shrugged. I had no opinion one way or the other.

"We need an air conditioner," she said. "But we can't afford an air conditioner. We should buy one anyway. I'm this close to a nervous breakdown."

She touched her thumb to her forefinger. Then she went for the fly swatter again. It was a hobby, a necessary diversion, and watching her swing it you knew she meant business.

"We don't have the money," I said. "I wish an air conditioner was all I had to think about. Maybe they were my stones."

"He's a psycho. Call the police. That's what they're there for."

"I'll call."

"No you won't. You say you will. You won't."

"I should tell him to go to hell."

"There's the phone." She pointed with the fly swatter, as if I didn't know where the phone was. Then she nailed a fly walking on top of the microwave.

Instead I called my insurance company to see if he'd filed a claim. A woman with a polite Southern accent listened to my story after a taped voice informed me our conversation might be recorded for quality purposes. Thanks to the small fortune I'd sent her over the years, she treated me like a prince.

"As of now no one has filed a claim, sir," she said. "But since it's your word against his, we believe you."

Her reassurance didn't make me feel any better so I called my attorney, an old college roommate who dispensed advice for a hefty fee but provided it to me for free.

"What if the stones did come from my truck?" I asked him.

"The law doesn't deal in 'what ifs'," he said. "My hunch is you've heard the last from this guy."

The following day, around supper time, Edward Ward spun his BMW onto my front lawn. He rounded the hood as if he was stopping just long enough to collect what was owed him. From the table where I sat drinking a beer I watched him. He wasn't a big guy, shorter and heavier than me, bald on top with stringy hair pulled into a ponytail. He wore cutoff chinos frayed at the knees and washed out canvas boat sneakers. Maybe his coming to my house did it for me. Or perhaps it was the outfit. Had he been wearing a business suit or a work uniform it might have been different. Seeing him I felt calm and centered. From the steps he spotted my truck in the driveway—a twelve year old Ford with the rusted dent in the rear bumper from the time I'd backed into a fire hydrant. The doorbell didn't work, never had, but he pressed it anyway. When nothing happened, he rattled the storm door. Even with the whirl of the fans and the dogs going crazy the vibration carried into the house.

Across the table the kids crammed cheese macaroni into their mouths. Ruby yanked a coiled rope of wet laundry out of the machine and dropped it into a plastic laundry basket. Through the window I noticed purple clouds advance from the west, piling on the backs of one another. For the first time in a week the humidity was about to break.

"Since when do people use our front door?" she asked over the commotion. "They must be Jehovahs."

"It's him," I told her.

She stopped what she was doing. A royal blue kid's bathing suit with a sliver starfish on the chest dangled from her hand. Holding the bathing suit she waited to see what I would do. The kids clutched spoons under their chins. For once the dogs shut up when I told them. It was as if I was about to perform a stunt from a great height. I was in that zone athletes go on about. Yes, yes, I said. Daddy will handle this. Everything will be fine.

"Good Jesus, are you insane?" she said to me. "You're going out there?"

Upstairs under our bed I kept an aluminum bat. Having it there helped me sleep. Someday, I told the kids after they discovered it, I might want to play baseball. In theory I would swing it at an intruder's head to protect my family from harm. Was this one of those moments? I decided it wasn't.

Edward Ward stepped to the side when I opened the storm door. He wore a wrinkled white dress shirt with a yellow stain on the pocket. A tattoo of a Chinese symbol floated on the side of his neck. His forearms were covered with a fine grit. He'd come from work, probably a marina where he sanded fiberglass and kept a flask stashed in the head of a yacht in dry dock. I could smell the booze.

He started in without preliminaries, as if we were old friends.

"Look at this. I want you to see for yourself."

I followed him to the car.

"Check it out," he said as he ran a finger over the crack in the windshield. Dings marked the hood secured with a black rubber bungee cord that stretched over the grill. He described his plans to restore the BMW over the coming winter, provided details as I glanced into the back seat at a sleeping bag unfurled over the torn upholstery, a duffel bag spilling gym clothes, a set of jumper cables. I had a hunch I wasn't the first to hear those plans.

"It's one of a kind," he added. "I don't care about the other stuff, just the windshield."

What was there to say? There was damage, sure. Anybody could see that. But who was going to pay for it? Across the street my neighbor ran a lawn mower over his dead grass. A shirtless teenager with a concave chest pedaled by without using handlebars. Somewhere steak roasted on a barbecue.

“That doesn’t prove anything,” I told him again.

He leaned against his car with his arms folded. Less substantial in person somehow, pudgy and stoop-shouldered, he seemed more like a buddy who hadn’t repaid a loan from ten years ago or else a cousin down on his luck. Even his nearly running me off the road I chalked up to trying to get my attention because of his horn. Paying him off, I knew, was the ticket to never seeing him again.

In a jammed utility drawer next to the sink we kept a wad of bills for emergencies. You couldn’t get the drawer open without tugging and swearing, which gave you time to think about whether you really needed what was in it.

“You’ll have to wait on that air conditioner,” I said to Rudy as I gave a final yank on the handle to spring the drawer open.

“Have you lost your mind?” she replied. “He’s a drunk who parked on our lawn!”

“They were my stones,” I said.

“Look at those faces over there,” she pleaded. “What if their father was lying in a ditch somewhere with his truck on top of him?”

“Except he’s right here.”

“About to pay off an extortionist.”

I counted out the twenties—fifteen of them. When I glanced up she shot me a look I’d seen just once, before we were married and an instant before a ceramic tea saucer flew in my direction. And at the time, though I couldn’t recall why we’d been fighting, I knew I’d driven her to the brink. When that projectile hit the door frame, the steam went out of both of us. I got the dustpan and hand broom and cleaned up the shards while she went upstairs to cry in the bedroom. But that was years ago, when our fights meant something.

I pocketed the bills and left the house. Edward Ward was smoking a cigarette. His eyes shifted up and down the street as if we were in the middle of a drug deal. I pulled the cash out and shoved it at him.

I resisted a dumb urge to shake his hand. Edward Ward didn’t offer his either. Without a thank-you, he pocketed the money and fixed his gaze on the house where something caught his attention. I turned around in time to

see Ruby charging across the lawn with the aluminum bat. At first I thought it was me she was after. But right off Edward Ward knew he was the target. Her eyes, I guess. As he scrambled into the driver's seat, she slammed the bat into the rear bumper. The vibration made her wince. Still, she held the bat between her breasts, squared her shoulders squared, and prepared for another swing.

"Choke up," I told her.

Edward Ward accelerated out of range and then stopped. Would he press his luck? Behind us the kids pressed their little faces against the window screen, waiting to see what their mother would do next.

She slid her fists together just as Edward Ward elected to drive on down the street. He proceeded slowly, entertaining second thoughts, but Ruby didn't budge until he'd turned right toward the highway.

"I promised the kids dessert if they stayed away from the windows," she said. "There's brownie mix in the cabinet but I'd have to light the oven. Thank God I'm off the hook. Here, take this."

"I wish they hadn't seen that," I said. "They're too young."

"Which that are you referring to? Mine or yours?"

"Yours," I said. "They won't sleep tonight."

"Either will I. I'm taking them to my mother's tomorrow. She's got AC. But that's not the only reason."

"It was the right thing to do."

"No it wasn't," she said. "It was the easy thing. There's a difference."

She left me with the bat. Rain was coming finally, the drops heavy, cold and hard. Before I followed her inside I decided I'd better check the truck for any more bits of gravel that might come loose.

NATASHA HAYS

When My Father Fell

When my father fell
and shattered his glasses on the unforgiving floor,
he made a sound of such despair and dismay,
but also, such decision.
And as the gaping cut above his eyebrow
seeped blood, and life, down his face,

the doctor in me shriveled, disappeared,
and I could only kneel on the floor beside him,
my stomach wedged in my throat,
my back hunching with inevitability,
and cry out, "Papa, oh Papa, oh Papa."
And helplessness overtook me, squeezing all my hope out
like a viper squeezing its victim.

And the people walking down the hall
looked, looked again, but most kept walking
until my fear-drenched face
compelled one of them to stop and follow its plea
to call the paramedics.
For, after all, it was a hospital.

But his brain was clogging with death before our eyes,
even though I had tried to force life back in it
by bringing wildflowers for the breakfast table daily.
And by rolling his wheelchair along the path to see
the density of the flickering fireflies, just the night before.
And I knew, even as they stitched up his wound
with layers of Dacron,
what he would say when we finally reached the oncologist's office:

No more.
No more.
No more.

JODY HERRING

Driver's Ed

If this were a comedy of sorts –
A somewhat witty blockbuster with the newest teenage starlet
Or a twenty-seven year old pretending to be seventeen –
You may have ran over a slew of traffic cones
Or bumped into a Mercedes and caused
a long hollow siren to emanate from the very being of the car.
Coffee shop patrons let loose the grips on their cappuccinos
And glare mockingly out a large plate glass window
As you embarrassingly put it into reverse and peal away from the curb.

But you did fine.
You checked both mirrors and your blind spots.
And used your turn signals at every appropriate time.
Your three-point turn was a little rusty
But that's the least to be expected.
We know you'll hardly ever use it,
But the state mandates it so we check it off
Even if it's a four-pointer or you nick the curb a bit.

I can tell your parents have done their part.
Taken you to empty parking lots and
Taught you the rules of the road.
And you've certainly got a knack for keeping it under the speed limit
Probably driven in your head time and again
by what you see as a bickering mother.
A father who only chides you silently
And gives you that glare that says,
You know what you did wrong.
The inward glare that only he sees, that says,
Please don't go.

TABATHA HIBBS

What I Carried

When we sat for an hour on the overpass
above a sea of cars, their metal bodies heated waves
shimmering to the horizon,
when I thought about the wind coming
toward the house boarded and abandoned,
when I thought about the life triaged in three hours
and crammed into two suitcases:

R.S. Thomas could not be left;
No room for grandmother's sewing machine;
Need the house deed—

then the sour spittle filled my mouth.
No water, no rinse could clear this taste
of tides rolling houses into the marsh,
of chenier islands dotting a shallow sea,
of the stink of fish washed into shrubs,
a scaly tinsel glinting in the sun.

I carried this taste to Arkansas
and chewed this cud of fear
while I watched on TV the tides break
over the sea wall, pelting the rain-suited weatherman.

The taste lingers now—flavoring each meal,
a seasoning of the city I left behind.
I chew this shame when I think of friends,
of friends left to their gutted homes.
I chew it now.

TABATHA HIBBS

Night Road

It must have been the track of rabbit
that restless men followed through Ozark hills—
the zig, the zag of the hunted,
the only thread through cross-hatched brush,
beaten finally into the road our car now travels.
We loop and backtrack along terraced hills
until we think we'll meet ourselves.
This asphalt ribbon twists past fruit stands,
perpetual yard sales, trailers with wind-buckled skirts,
past hills spotted with cattle, with goats,
hills mown, nipped, fenced into pastoral poverty.

But it's a different road at night
when the pavement merges into darkness,
and it seems as likely we'll drive off
the earth's flat edge
as find the curve of the near horizon.
We follow car lights through blackness
that has vanished fruit stands and sagging trucks,
cling to these lights that bounce off hills
and catch the eye gleam of the hunted.
We settle more firmly into seats,
hold more tightly to the arm rest,
look out side windows into darkness
thick as a closed tomb,
know a house is there, a barn,
cattle, even, sleeping in the night,
know, too, the black night is a veil
impossible to cross.
We turn back to the lights washing the trees gray,
cling to that guiding sphere until the lights of town are made.

JANE HICKS

Close Order

Fern's feet did not reach the floor
yet she sat in the upper level
at Pyburn School, in the shadow
of Chimney Top Mountain. Her dark
eyes measure the tree shadow, compute
the height, the formula new and impetuous
to be tried. She figures corn bushels in the crib,
tallies the bill at Uncle Wilbur's store
before he can ring it in the great register.
Numbers sing and dance for her
swift and sure, they measure the world.

Exam papers tallied, she exits eighth grade,
dreams of high school ten miles down
the creek bed to the all-weather road.
She is eleven and does not know
she will not attend the school
that refuses a scrawny, underage girl
who chops corn, tops tobacco, captures
gardens in endless rows of pale green jars
until the town textile mill calls
her at eighteen to pack her bags,
walk out of the holler to become the
right hand of the plant foreman
who does not hear the song of numbers
in bobbin whine and loom clack.

She trains his tallies, rights his orders,
moves from hairnets and brogans
to neat ledgers and spectator pumps
in the front office where numbers
march and drill to her order.

LOWELL JAEGER

After Second Shift

She stops for groceries.
Her snow boots slosh
up and down the aisles, the store
deserted: couple stock boys
droning through cases of canned goods,
one sleepy checker at the till.

In the parking lot, an elderly man
stands mumbling outside his sedan,
all four doors open to the black
night. She asks him, *Are you okay?*
He's wearing pajama pants, torn slippers,
a rumpled sportcoat, a knit wool hat.

Says he's waiting for his wife.
*I just talked to her on the pay phone
over there.* He's pointing at
the Coke machine. *What pay phone?*
she says. *That one,* he says.
It's cold, she says, and escorts him

inside. *Don't come with lights
and sirens,* she tells the 911
dispatcher. *You'll scare him.*
They stand together. The checker
brings him a cup of coffee. They watch
for the cop car in the lot.

He could have died, her husband tells her.
You did the right thing. So she
sleeps eventually. And dreams
she's dialing him up on the Coke machine.
And wakes when he answers.
It's her husband's voice. *Are you okay?*

STEPHANIE N. JOHNSON

While the Children Were Sleeping

I'm working my way down the list.
Hummus and avocados.

Separation and longing.
The cocoa beans from South America.

A white brimmed hat made in China.
Give me this day—

Another prayer leaving footprints
on the dock.

A barefoot profit, a goddess.
Will I give all that I have

and hold nothing back? Is this
true? Could I be cement if asked?

What I did with sunlight just now,
full of desire, while the children

were sleeping. I went to the water
and slipped in, swimming to the depths.

Under the bridge of sky, the glassy
dome where all prayers pool

before releasing higher into the branches—
under it all I am shattered.

The birds sing and then
don't sing. They sit like spirits

hushed within each wing. Believe them—
they've traveled so far.

W. F. LANTRY

Grace

The porch, unpainted, falls to disrepair
peacocks contend the fences, and her swans
contest each scattered kernel, flung to ground
as if by unseen hands. All undeserved
benevolence is evident in one
sunlit display, between the half-designed

or accidental blossomings of limbs
moving by days from red through pink to white
almost immune from frost, as her long spring
escapes whatever winds are still to come.
And yet, her garden, and her landscape bears
tormented lacerations. In these scars

reflected in her form, we understand
the wounds we suffer open us to grace,
as if the violence is a gift, as if
the slashing blade or pointed horn could rend
more than our flesh, could open us to earth
and strengthen us to bear that charity

we never thought could make us whole. Those birds
continue their displays in sunlight as
the petals fall around them, as if snow
were coming out of season, and could freeze
our words before we understood, or keep
those wings from beating past the broken fence.

CHRISTY WISE

Not Knowing a Man

At my father's memorial service, Mom sat on my right and my husband, Bob, was on my left. Or maybe my two-year-old daughter, Lee, was wiggling on my left. I don't recall. But I definitely remember Mom on the right with my brother, Jeff, on her other side.

Our family's many friends filled the modern wooden church, a place never attended by my dad but close to their home. Many friends had driven or flown quite a distance to be with us. Most people in the church were closer to my mom than they'd been to my father, a man who kept to himself for the most part. But they loved my dad, too, especially his college classmates and those who sang with him in the chorale. Articulate, intelligent and well-read, Dad rose to the pleasures of social occasions, laughing and talking with everyone. He enjoyed himself immensely at dinner parties or at the theatre or symphony. He and mom gathered with friends at tailgate picnics before college football games, at art galleries and openings, and, after we had left home, traveled with one or two couples on weekend getaways.

But most likely he wouldn't have done any of that without my mom making the arrangements. Nor would he have called or written any of the people in the room if not for her. Women often serve as the managers and initiators of social activities in marriages but Mom and Dad's case seemed more extreme than most. I can't recall him ever picking up the telephone to make plans even with his own family or with people he knew before he met Mom. He had no separate friendships. Although Mom thoroughly enjoyed organizing all the social planning, more than once she expressed to me her incredulity about his unwillingness to keep in touch on his own. "What would happen if I didn't make the plans?" she'd say. "Would he become a hermit?" As far as I was concerned, he practically was.

When my brother and I were still lived at home, he wasn't at all forthcoming, often reading the *San Francisco Chronicle* for hours on the weekend, lying on his back on the couch. After his time on the couch, he might run a couple of errands in the car, alone. He did adore spending time in the garden and spent some really hard work there – pruning fruit trees on a ladder, weeding meticulously, watering and doing major plantings. On weekends, in the summer, we'd all go to the swim club together where he'd say hi to friends but mostly lay in the sun and read or sleep, or swim during

“adult swim.” He didn’t play Marco Polo or water tag with us that I can remember.

As a family, we took many long car trips either to visit his parents in Sacramento and, after they retired, in Carmel, or to take various vacations up and down the coast of California, Oregon and Washington. Dad was the driver. Never speaking, his eyes fixated on the road ahead unless Jeff and I roughhoused too much and then he yelled, while still looking at the road and not turning around, “Stop fighting or I’ll slap you into the middle of next week!” The yelling was particularly startling because he’d been silent for so long. His silence created a tension in the car’s atmosphere that contrasted with the lightness and joviality when Mom drove us around during the week to piano lessons or doctors’ appointments, or just dragged us along when she had to shop for groceries because we were too young to be left home. On those occasions, all three of us would talk, joke, laugh, argue and just be ourselves. With Dad’s silent presence, we were more reserved, except when we were acting up which we did, no doubt, to get his attention. I wanted to see if he was still alive.

Mom was Dad’s sole confidante and they talked for what seemed like hours over cocktails every night before dinner, Dad sitting on the couch looking out across the San Francisco Bay toward the City and Mom facing him, in an armchair. We were discouraged from entering the living room and interrupting them. It was clear Dad wanted Mom’s company alone. I remember feeling abandoned every evening around 6 p.m. when he came home and Mom was no longer available to us. It felt like the day ended when he walked in the door. As we grew older, we ate dinner with them, rather than before he got home, but still they had their cocktail hour alone before our meal.

I could completely understand Dad’s attachment to Mom. She was an amazing listener and a great audience, offering intelligent insights and laughing at humorous remarks even when they weren’t all that funny. But we were a family. Why couldn’t we all be together in the living room, talking and laughing? I resented my father.

Sometimes, to be mischievous, Jeff and I gathered on our knees or stomachs in the hall, right at the edge of the beige wall-to-wall carpet that defined the living room, making lots of noise so that Mom and Dad knew we were there. Occasionally, Dad spoke to us from across the border or even allowed us to join them for a while, but more often he’d shoo us away.

For the memorial service, we’d struggled with the decision about who should officiate. A self-proclaimed atheist, my father didn’t have a regular

minister or church so to preside over the service, we'd invited the man who was my minister and friend during my hard-drinking, rebellious teen years. Unfortunately, my former minister didn't know Dad very well and called him "Newton" rather than "Newt" which was jarring.

But the music was beautiful and familiar, particularly the pieces sung by the Winifred Baker Chorale, of which Dad had been a 30-year member. I felt carried back to a childhood of listening to Dad singing in concerts, many held in churches because so much chorale music is religious. When I was a little older than my daughter, Lee, I would lie down in the pew halfway through an evening concert, and sleep, surrounded by the music. As I grew older, I could stay awake through entire concerts and loved being carried away by the music. It was uplifting and inspiring. When I was in my teens, I protested having to attend Dad's concerts. I wanted to be out with my friends or listening to my own preferred music like the Rolling Stones, Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and, a local favorite, Sons of Champlin, not sitting through a program of classical music.

But now that I wouldn't hear Dad sing again, I felt overwhelmingly sad and nostalgic. I was grateful for the gift he'd given me of my appreciation for chorale music, a music I returned to in my twenties.

One of Dad's college friends, Sam, spoke first, talking about their days working together on the college newspaper and later, in San Francisco, as colleagues in journalism and public relations. Both men left journalism somewhat reluctantly for practical reasons; public relations paid better and allowed them to provide more comfortably for their families.

"Newt's greatest pleasure was his family," Sam said. "He doted on Nancy and the children, talking about their latest interests and accomplishments."

I shifted in my seat. Love for us? Talked about our accomplishments? This was breaking news to me. Had he mentioned that to Sam and not us? What had I missed? When? I had no recollection of him praising me for any accomplishments and I knew for a fact that he'd rarely attended any of my swim meets. I didn't doubt the veracity of Sam's comments but this was a side to Dad I'd never known. Doted on Mom? I glanced at Mom. Her eyes were red but she'd stopped crying. She looked up at Sam with a slight questioning frown on her face.

Walt, a second college friend, one who lived out of the Bay Area and was usually quite witty, spoke about his and Dad's first years out of college and the fun they'd had together living in a rented bachelor house in Belvedere with a third friend, all three working in San Francisco. The three handsome

young men had fought and survived World War II, returned from overseas to finish college, and were starting their careers. I could envision Dad as I'd seen him in photos, with his head of dark, curly hair, wearing khakis, argyle vests and loafers. There was a lightness to Walt's tone despite the somber occasion and, periodically, some welcome humor. We all laughed gratefully at the funny parts and it felt like some air had been let into the room. Not having seen Dad with his children over the years, Walt didn't mention Dad's relationship with us, making his remarks more authentic to me. He spoke about Dad meeting Mom and how wonderful she is. Walt said Dad loved her vivaciousness and warmth, her intelligence and sharp perceptions. This I could understand.

But I started shifting in my seat again with the eulogy by Martha Sharp, Mom and Dad's neighbor after I'd left home for college. She described Mom and Dad's devotion to their friends and neighbors, including Martha and her husband, William. Mom and Dad always remembered their birthdays and anniversaries, and brought home mementoes from their travels for their daughter. When my parents' lemon tree was full of fruit, bowls of lemons appeared on the Sharp's front porch.

Martha spoke of the sadness of the occasion. She quoted Hilaire Belloc about the value of a friend. "You are everywhere admired, everywhere respected, and, by those who have the honour of your acquaintance, loved..."

As Martha spoke, I knew the words were heartfelt and true for her, and for almost everyone in the room. Socially, Dad was exquisitely urbane, educated, humorous, intelligent, handsome and thoroughly appreciated by his friends. However, he was emotionally closed to those of us who were closest to him.

Martha then spoke of Dad's gentleness, saying he was a gentle man as well as a gentleman. "Newt Wise did not have a mean bone in his body. Although he was able to analyze with intelligence and make incisive comments, he was never, ever judgmental."

I looked at Mom. She moved her left hand over to cover my right hand. I was afraid to meet her eyes for fear of laughing out loud and was sure she shared my reaction. Martha continued about Dad's being a good friend and about his interest in so many things – music, art, gardening, travel, business, writing, reading – all true, but also only part of the story.

"Newt respected others. He listened to them," she said. "He asked after them. Even teenagers. I especially appreciated his respect for teenagers."

I was dumbfounded. Dad must have had a personality transplant after I went away to college, I thought, with sarcasm, remembering the bitter

and vicious arguments I'd had with Dad during high school, many in protest of his judgments of me. I uncrossed my legs, rubbed the back of my neck with my left hand and looked down at my lap. Mom's left hand still rested gently on my right. She leaned ever so slightly closer to me and in a quiet whisper for my ears only said the exact words I was thinking.

"Is she talking about the same man we knew?"

Oh, how I loved her.

KARLA LINN MERRIFIELD

At the RCMP Outpost

Names on two granite gravestones,
set within a picket fence
at Dundas Harbour on Devon Island,
whisper above the murmuring permafrost.
Constable Stephens' last remains
whimper how a rifle misfired,
accidents happen in the High Arctic,
while the bones of Maisonneuve
scream *Au contraire, a bullet*
to my brain was the intention
of despair. Either way, spilled blood
spells the cold, lonely language of death.

SARAH MERROW

Autumn Rot

Here's rooting for decay in
siren-flamed sunshine
where pavement cracks grow weeds,
rats caper at the fences, and
a bony stray naps on the porch
we decided not to paint this year --
something about decrepitude
and alley aesthetics won that day.

We're all a little desiccated
after the season's earthquake,
downpours, wind and heat,
but now it's the sprout, the leap,
the sleeping in the sun that's key,
eyelids low, breathing the rank
and rubbery twitch of leaf-death.

For the same bright river that spills
from distant peaks and smooths
the jagged erratics of an ice age
we've all heard about, then
delivers them dancing as glitter
between your toes at the sea edge

makes it way to the falls
via this lane named Lovegrove,
from back street storm drain
to the reshaping
of Permanence, I tell you --
and puny words are all we have,
unlike the rat and the weed,
as rock becomes the river
that carves the canyon
that, en route, breaks us open too.

KAORI MIYASHITA-THEADO

Gasshō, a Prayer

I join palms together in prayer

Cars sway on the waves
houses are swallowed and spit out
a man is drunk up by the tide

“I heard the Tsunami crying ‘Bwoooo!’
and saw it swelling and dashing past the beach
trees and houses blown down, crashing”

Mind stopped for a moment

Elementary school principal
encourages his pupils, “The waves will withdraw soon”
upper graders hold onto lower graders

Schoolchild’s new satchel
never worn
floats in the sea

Father’s last words: “Go up higher!”
saved his daughter’s life
she is a college student

A husband looking for his wife
puts her name and telephone number
on his bicycle, wandering

Old man, married for forty-nine years,
covers the body of his wife with soil
he wishes her body to return to the ground where it should be

Captain of the fishing boat from Kesen-numa
came ashore and found
his family safe, holds his family in his arms

A man who lived near the nuclear power plant
heads north with his three grandchildren bundled in plastic bags
abandoning their dogs and cats

A note found in the stricken area:
“I will leave the dead body in our living room.
Please come and take care of it”

A farmer whose crops
are poisoned by radiation
kills himself

Survivors
take their dogs for walks
on quiet railroad tracks

Young people were to start
their jobs
in April

The spreading disaster
thickly, deeply
branded on the land

blanket

water

rice ball

miso soup

Links in a chain of compassion

People
in a stream
between life and death

I join palms together in prayer

JOE MILLS

Markings

Even as successful as he is now,
Jake says he can't help thinking of her
no matter what he writes. He keeps
imagining she's approaching from behind,
a dark fluttering of wings, a piercing
Awk! and Frag! then the grim pinch
of talons as she tries to rip off a dangling
modifier or pry apart a noun and verb
that don't agree. Back in the bleach-scented
classrooms, I had thought of her more
like an employee of a morgue, dispassionately
identifying and marking diseased parts,
cutting them out with a clinical efficiency,
then eating lunch as we carted the corpses
away to bury. Now, however, as I find myself
lost in my own dark wood, trying to make
the simplest of shelters, each word seems rotten,
each sentence breaks at the slightest pressure,
and I too sense her perched somewhere near,
eager to descend and start worrying apart
the little I've managed to put together.

JOSHUA D. MINER

American Nimbus

I remember green
 cumulus slipping east
 over our Ozarks: a history
 of plains wars, rail tycoon races
merged
 with the suppression and mystery
 of brushfires, of mountain
 cricks / hollers swollen
to new storm cells.

In this environment
 we live under dark nimbus,
some monolithic American angst brewed
 in our infinite oily interior
by fervid / depressive

temperaments.

This our biggest export
cowpokes and 'gals bred

hour-cycle suspicion that
swells / shrouds the bright

to Arabia:
in a maelstrom of story,
rumor and 24-

mistaken for petrochem

fiery heads
of young engineers
and expats,
halo.

NANCY CAROL MOODY

The Cherries at Tiffany's

The plastic cherries
near the drug store entrance
look so real

that the clerk tells us
about the children
who come in, so taken

with what seems genuine
that they dip their hands
instinctively in the bowl,

lift their faces and hold
the dazzling fruit
to their mouths.

Such lustrous deception—
red layered upon deeper
red, occasional flecks

like sparks flaring,
the thin stem a complex
of green-woven filaments,

a fibrous braid of grass,
beckoning. Who wouldn't
be seduced by this gleam

and polish? These cherries,
small charmers, are such
cunning imposters that

even we, soft and jowly
from middle age, jaded
by a lifetime of gimmickry

and artifice, cannot resist
the impulse to reach
into the bowl and disprove

the illusion, our hopeful
fingers hungry for the small
and tender heft, the delicious

resistance of the flesh.

ALICE OSBORN

Early

I'm the last one he sees
before my train hits him
on a stretch between Cedar Rapids and Chicago.
His bark-brown eyes snap
in the inked jewel of gravel and air,
iron and wood,
damned and driver.

His loose body
ignores the descending crossing gates—
one hand extends a bottle,
the other clutches a Bible.
All of him whispers in the shallow pockets
of his leather jacket; he whips
his head around to face me. And I only hear
my mother saying, It's better to be late
in this life than early in the next.

A thousand parrots screech at once,
the whistle cancels him, his equation clears
off the books, debts repaid.

Later, his cracked rubber Rockports
mark the death spot,
in between the rails grow
a bed of yellow wildflowers.
He flew fifty feet
from the scored heels, the tongue
bunched into the sweat-stained insole.

D. E. LEE

The Eggs

She was thinking about how to protect the eggs when she started on the road to town. The way her aunt once held one between her thumb and finger and said the insides were protected like secrets by their thin shells. And then she dropped it on the floor and made her clean it up and stroked her back while she wiped the yolk with a cloth and whispered in her ear to be careful, to keep secrets, so there would be no mess. And ever since that time when she was nine on her hands and knees with the cold sticky whites dripping from her fingers she minded the eggs.

Her shopping list was short, made up while she'd sat in bed listening to her husband banging his girlfriend on the sofa. She'd worked by the red light of the clock radio. Then she'd pulled the covers over her face and closed her eyes, playing out scenes of revenge, of cracking him over the head with a bat, of stabbing the slut through the heart, drifting asleep wondering what had stopped her from getting out of bed that instant and running down the narrow hall with teeth bared and nails striking like steel knives. She'd been so still she couldn't cry. All she could do was curl into a ball and pretend she was listening to the television. By the time the sun had brightened her room she'd gathered her children and her list and had left her husband sleeping on the sofa after sneaking empty beer bottles from the coffee table and disposing of them.

At first she'd walked fast as if putting distance between her and her husband would slow the panic building inside her. Now, she eased up and looked around. Fat gray clouds lumbered by. The shifting rays of daylight distracted her and spread a golden cloth over the fields. Blue shadows lay down at the feet of pines pressed together like a fearful crowd. Brown dust billowed behind a tractor. She could just make out a figure riding in the cab but couldn't tell if it was Goodloe or his daughter Sara, who'd gone from an inseparable friend to a stranger in the space of the summer before high school.

The heat from the road crawled up her legs, and she smiled knowing the smile could not be seen and waved across the field. In the corner of her eye she saw her daughter also waving. The tractor rambled on, sounding like a bee over the distance.

She took the list from her pocket and realized she'd have to find a place to put the eggs. Her first thought was that they could go in the stroller

with the baby. They would be safe in the blankets, the infant unable to roll onto them. But the rough asphalt made the stroller jerk in her hands, and it was no good, no use taking the risk. A thirty-egg tray on its side wouldn't make it back. She looked behind at their trailer receding beyond a sprawling oak and ahead at the hot mirage floating above the straight road, and then down at the sunny head of her daughter, who appeared to be watching the dust rise from her pink ballet flats. She glanced at the thickening clouds that slatted the sun's rays and then back at her daughter, whose hair hung lazy across her shoulders, whose unassuming gaze trusted everything it fell upon.

The tractor disappeared behind a stand of loblollies bristling in the August heat. The field on the other side was bursting white with cotton bolls perched on the palms of brown skeleton hands. Automatically she rubbed her thumb and looked at it and imagined she'd see the blood running over it again. It was how they had made old people dolls. Sara had thought of it and led her into her daddy's rows. "Careful, Dinah, how you grab them," she'd said. They picked the fibers with pinching fingers and put the fluffs into a paper sack. They ran along squealing and searching for the largest bolls, the two of them embraced between the high rows of cotton. Far out in the field, she stopped at one the size of her fist, billowing and white like a summer cloud.

The memory of what happened next remained as sharp as the hull that pierced her thumb. She had called Sara to come see. Sara's stringy hair flounced above her shoulders as she ran, her mouth a pretty row of teeth just biting over her lip. Her eyes widened when she saw the size of the boll. "Go on and get it, Dinah," she'd said. "Don't just stand there."

She reached for the boll and screamed when she felt the hull slice through her thumb. The pain seared downward into her hand, and she trembled with her jaws going numb. She dropped to her knees and cried. The blood glided across her palm to her wrists and dripped onto her pants. Seeing the stains made her cry louder. "They're gonna whup me! They're gonna whup me!" Her voice, she remembered, had sounded like something screamed into a tin can. She stuck her hand out to keep it as far away as possible and seeing the red smears made her cry so hard her head began to hurt. The way the pattern of crimson and pink had brung out the horror of her hand, made the bone structure thin, the joints and palm creases bright in contrast, how it had freed the memory of the night she'd spent with her aunt and uncle while her parents were away, how she woke her aunt to show her the bloody hand, the stains on her Care Bear panties and thighs, and told her aunt what had happened and saw her uncle lying like a dead horse on the

bed with his back away from her, and his gruff voice saying, "I must have been walking in my sleep." Before she could protest her aunt led her into the kitchen and dropped an egg on the floor.

And poor Sara, her mouth open, as if mimicking the terror she was watching, not understanding the depths of the pain, she'd done what any girl would do to comfort a friend, put her arm around her shoulder and pulled her so close that the corn milk smell of her sweat filled her nostrils. She watched as Sara wiped the blood with tissues from her pocket and held her hand without fear, and caught her eye for a moment that would change them forever.

Later, she was outraged, thinking Sara had taken advantage of her while she was vulnerable and felt sick at her inability to fight back. And the grim way Sara narrowed her eyes and said, "This is our secret."

But at the time she was only surprised by the silence of the gesture and the taste of her mouth and afterward the lingering sensation on her lips, quiet and soft as wind caressing leaves in a soybean field.

She felt a hand on her bare leg and looked down at her daughter who was pointing at the stroller.

"What do you want, Jep? You have to tell me."

Jep lifted a bottle from the stroller.

"You want water?" She turned the cap and gave it to her. "You got to ask, Jep. You can talk. Just you tell me what you want. OK?"

Jep nodded.

She checked the baby, made sure the towel still protected her from the sun, adjusted the latex nipple in her mouth. Then she stroked Jep's head, wiping a film of sweat from the back of her neck. She pushed the stroller forward, thinking once more about where to put the eggs. Jep could carry them a little ways, but not all the way back home. She wished she had the truck, realized it had been a mistake to run out of the house the way she had done, but she had been so angry she shook her fists to force tears. Somehow she had to do it—had to get the eggs back without making a mess. While she stood there needled by the heat the frustration of her decisions swooped through her chest and pulled hard on her knees. She rubbed her forehead. Then she felt something wet on her leg, looked down, and saw Jep pressing the water bottle against her thigh and looking up with generous eyes that said, if you hold me it will be all right.

She breathed deeply and scanned the horizon. The sun dodged the clouds and threw down the heat. She pulled at her crotch where her shorts were chafing her thighs.

Farther on she saw the preacher's house rising from the road, first the chimney, then the green roof, the windows peeping over the crest of the

road, and the porch like a mouth filled with brown teeth. As she came closer she saw Mrs. Blueflower arranging plants around boxwood hedges. Her face was hidden beneath a straw hat with a wide brim. She waved when Mrs. Blueflower lifted her head, and the woman rose to her feet and wiped her forehead and set her spade on the steps and came out to the road. Her hands were covered by black gloves. One thumb had broken through the material.

"Where you headed day like this? With your little ones straggling along." Mrs. Blueflower's skin was deep red and wrinkled. "And this one ain't even got a hat. But my, Jep, you're just as pretty as your momma."

"Say hello to Mrs. Blueflower, Jep." She edged the girl forward. "Go on now."

Jep turned away and stood behind the stroller.

"Shy one, ain't she?" Mrs. Blueflower pulled off one of her gloves. "Well, let me get a peek at your baby."

She let out a little laugh. "Jep don't say a word lest you pinch her good."

"A time to keep silence and a time to speak, the Lord saith, that's Harvey talking for you." Mrs. Blueflower bent over the stroller and pulled away the towel. "And look, would you? Look at this angel sleeping. The prettiest little hands. Now, Dinah, you make sure you keep her thumb out of her mouth. Nothing wears out a thumb like a nasty mouth."

"I do my best with her, Mrs. Blueflower. But she's a sleeper, quiet all the night through."

"The Lord know how to make a pretty little one, don't He? That's what Harvey always say. Got a comment on everything."

She looked over Mrs. Blueflower's bent back, watched her reaching in to pet the baby with her long fingers. Her eyes drifted beyond Mrs. Blueflower's boney frame toward the porch where impatiens were blooming red and pink and white, and she smiled, not because the impatiens, as beautiful as they looked against their greenery, had made her feel any certain way, but because her baby made Mrs. Blueflower sigh with pleasure, a sound she'd heard often wherever she went, people coming up to look at the baby, *oohing* and *aahing*, to talk about how pretty or sweet she looked. It was as if the entire community had agreed that her baby, of all babies, deserved their attention, and whatever she was feeling at the time would be swept away by a flood of joy deep in her breast.

Mrs. Blueflower stood up with her hands on her hips, the dirty glove clasped in her fist.

She could no longer see the impatiens and felt sad and, just to do something, said, "And how is Preacher Blueflower? His heart—"

"Oh forget that," Mrs. Blueflower said. "Harvey'll be the first to tell you the Lord get you when He want you. Never know, Harvey'd say, if the next step, that very next one, be your last." She turned to look at the house and turned back. "Fact, he's probably in his den right now—that's the washer room to you and me—working out his sermon for tomorrow. Know what he does? Come in talking about the Lord visiting him during the night and led him to a box of rat poison—"

"Rat poison?"

"Exactly that. I says, 'Harvey what fool thing you doing?' And he holds up that box above his head, holds it up the way you see him hold up the Bible when he's getting to his point and then he climbs the step-stool in the kitchen while I'm in there stirring grits and pulling apart bacon and works himself up, 'I will make mine arrows drunk with blood,'—the way he says *blood* with that voice like a squawking jay—'and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.' Oh, he went on half the morning and I had to drag him off that stool just to get him busy eating."

"Sometimes I think about revenge, Mrs. Blueflower. Am I bad?" The wind picked up and flowed over her fingers. Her voice seemed to come from the wind and she looked down and saw her fingers trembling.

Mrs. Blueflower knelt by the stroller and cooed at the baby.

She saw over her head the impatiens lit up by sunlight, imagined that the petals were waving at her. Their motion in the breeze like a song, a lullaby with some meaning she could not understand.

"Revenge." Mrs. Blueflower rose from the ground with her dirty hand balanced on the edge of the sun canopy. "That's what Harvey was getting to. He said it was like eating rat poison and hoping the rat'll die. And I'm just standing there stirring the pot of grits and looking at him, and I say 'you think anyone'll understand a word of that?' and he says, 'when the Lord speaks through me the flock will hear it in their hearts,' and he's tall on that stool, looking like a Christmas tree waiting for someone to string up lights."

She felt dizzy, thought it was the sun getting to her, wished she'd never come this way. But there was no other way. Mrs. Blueflower's hand reached across the canopy, felt the rough skin on her forearm. One of them was shaking, but she couldn't tell who it was. Mrs. Blueflower said, "Give it to the Lord, Dinah. He knows your heart."

She nodded and wanted to speak, but her tongue lay like a stone in her mouth.

Mrs. Blueflower must have sensed how she felt. A smile jumped on her face and she said, "My, but you have some quiet children, Dinah." She touched Jep's hair. "I just can't get over how beautiful they are. Looking just like you. But to gaze on them you'd think they knew something they weren't supposed to say, the way they keep to themselves. Children, Harvey'd say, like olive plants round about the table."

A shadow passed over the ground. The clouds fattened above the treeline. "We better get," she said.

Mrs. Blueflower saw it too. "Don't let the rain wet you. You call if you get stuck." She smiled at Jep. "Sugar melts."

She pushed the stroller onto the road. A freight train rumbled distantly. She pinched her shirt between her breasts and pulled out to let the air flow over her sticky skin. A dust storm of tiny insects blew across from the weeds. The insects reminded her of her husband, and she imagined him just now waking up and finding them gone and becoming angry, anything for a reason, and saw Jep huddled beside the sofa, unable to scream or cry. All feeling buried inside, feeling, she thought, helpless and subdued. Had she taught Jep silence? And what of the baby who seemed to do nothing but sleep? Her mother had told her to leave him. He was no good. But hadn't she also said stay with him, hadn't she said that by staying with her drunken father?

A crisp shadow fell over them. Pines rose from the ground on both sides of the road. The tops of the pines were swaying, a high wind that sent limp currents downward. She pulled up her hair and let the wind caress the back of her neck. But it was no use against the stubborn heat.

She worried that the heat would spoil the eggs. Her aunt had taught her that a bad egg will float when it's put in a bowl of cold water. Another way was to crack the egg on a plate. A flat yolk and wide-spreading whites meant bad. Blood spots were scary, but her aunt said they were nothing to worry about. The stroller canopy was flat. The eggs might rest there. She could cover them with one of the baby's blankets. She pretended the eggs were riding atop and practiced pushing the stroller with one hand. The stroller veered off course. She pushed with her thumb and extended her fingers over the canopy and imagined she could hold the eggs that way. Seemed it might work. She was running out of options.

The sky opened out of a shade of pines. She stood at the Highway 2 cutoff and looked back where Goodloe's farm stopped. A dirty white granary tower stood like a castle at the edge of town. She could make out the square roof of Mitchell's hardware store. Just beyond that The Pig had been done

up with metal siding after a tornado flattened it and tossed its "Every Day is Saving Day" sign into Darton's small engine repair shop. Over the buildings a purple smear of clouds sprouted from the treeline. Every so often bright flashes lit up the rolling mass.

On the main road cars whizzed by. She watched them, wondering what the hesitation in her stomach was all about. At first she thought it was a hunger pang, but she realized that she feared making decisions. Getting on the busy road, just the latest one. She thought of her mother and dreamed she had the courage to pack a bag and take her babies to a place where no one would know her, toward the Gulf towns, or farther on to Pensacola. What could she do, she had no skills. None but keeping secrets. She looked at Jep, who had knelt down to pick up a bottle cap, listened to the silence of her sleeping baby. Her thoughts tumbled like children on a playground. She saw herself being brave, doing something that made her feel good, but the image was so blurry, she knew at once it was hopeless.

Jep pulled on the hem of her shorts and pointed behind. She turned and saw a truck flying toward them. She trembled, thinking it was her husband and what he would do catching her out here on the highway with the babies and a storm threatening overhead. Her body tightened, ready to hear how stupid she was. But when the truck stopped next to them, she saw Randy Thurman at the wheel with his Team Realtree ball cap down tight. He was shouting over the noise of his engine, a sound like coat hangers fighting it out in a metal can. She felt her body softening, and she went to the window, where she saw him framed against Goodloe's cotton field. She made out that he was offering a lift. She nodded and he jumped out and hoisted the stroller into the bed and lifted Jep into the front. She slid in next to Jep with the baby worn across her shoulder.

"Heard you was rigging in the Gulf," she said.

He spit tobacco into a green plastic bottle. "Busting ass fourteen fourteen and coffined up down New Orleans rest of the time. Finally got enough vacation and thought I'd come see Daddy. You ain't changed much."

"How long you here?"

"Heading back tomorrow, long fore sun up."

"Can't imagine what it's like out there."

He chuckled. "Just a hometown girl, I reckon." He spit in the bottle. "Ain't so bad, just lonely sometimes. You're popular, probably don't know what I mean."

She scraped a curtain of hair from her forehead. "I still feel bad about standing you up. Don't guess I ever said apologize. Don't guess I ever said why. Guess I got too good at keeping things to myself."

She watched him, but he looked straight ahead. She sensed his eyes busy only with traffic. He punched the words out. "Hell, girl. I done forgot all that. Water, under the bridge."

She smiled. "I was always impulsive."

She still liked the way he looked. His brown skin glowed with a layer of sweat. A scar traveled like a backwoods road from the edge of his eye through the rough terrain of his beard. The more she gazed at him the more she wished he would just look at her once, say something the way he used to in senior year. The way the past jumped so easily into the present startled her. But now she had nothing else to say. She felt Jep leaning against her hip, reminding her how things had changed. The wind rushing through the open windows jacketing her with memories and the smell of exhaust and soil.

"Your babies grown up good," he said and spit in the bottle.

The heaviness of his tone made her wince.

They passed the granary and the open salvage yard with its high barbed-wire fence and rolled up to the stoplight at the crossroad of 78 and 173. The dark clouds moved like black skirts beyond the burned out frame of Humbles gas station. A little farther on she could see the white aluminum of the store.

"Daddy's got some surface runoff," Randy said, swinging into the parking lot. "Here to pick up a well seal. Good seeing you."

She watched him circle out of the lot and cross the street into Mitchell's, and she turned toward the store and thought once more about the eggs. She adjusted the baby on her shoulder and found that she could push the stroller with one hand easily enough. The eggs could rest in the stroller on the way home.

She picked a path through the cars huddled in their slanted spaces near the entrance. She was far off enough to see the vehicles moving in searching patterns for the nearest openings and shoppers crossing between the cars. She pulled Jep closer, hitched the baby tighter against her shoulder and reached the end of the row and pushed past the tail of a rolling vehicle to the store side of the lot. She glanced up. The storm cloud coughing up its thunder climbed the back of the town. She'd been aware that getting home would be difficult, but now the likelihood of having to get home in a downpour gave her a fleeting sense of fear and this feeling touched a deeper sense of helplessness that surfaced from time to time, that made her unable to do anything but take it until it passed. She shook her head, and somehow pushed on.

Up ahead, she saw Bill and Renee Frank coming out of the store. She shifted the baby and waved. The Franks stabled horses. For a moment she was on horseback riding the forest trails near the Choctaw River. She had been with a group of friends. They'd all looked as if they were having fun. But she'd been afraid. A sign on the stable door had read, "Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared." She'd repeated it the entire trip until she felt her fear loosening its grip. Renee Frank waved back. Bill Frank carried a small paper bag on one arm and held Renee's hand with the other.

Someone kept honking a horn. She turned and saw a gray Falcon with tinted windows veering through the lot toward her. The horn kept going in short blasts. She smiled and waited, figuring someone wanted to see her baby. The surge of happiness in her breast was irresistible, and she knew it wouldn't last. Jep had once received all the attention, but now people treated her differently. It was as if babies had some magical substance that people wanted rubbed off on them. She cradled the baby so her face looked toward the Falcon and took Jep's hand and stepped into the road to meet the car.

The door swung open and her uncle put down a mud-caked boot on the pavement. "Look like you got your hands full," he said. His smile was jagged like the rest of his face.

At once her mind swirled darkly like the clouds overhead. Her skin tightened around her bones. Her lips trembled but were unable to move. A feeling like a backhoe digging through her stomach. The edges of her vision became blurry. Slowly, an image came together covered in scarlet. She was swinging an ax and her uncle lay at her feet in pieces, and Mrs. Blueflower was crying beside her and reminding her about the rat poison, and *she* was crying with a sweet taste on her tongue she was trying to spit out.

A motion distracted her. Her uncle reaching into his pocket, retrieving something green and flat and shiny. He held it out and said, "Oh, don't make such a face, Dinah. It's just a stick of gum."

He waved the gum at Jep and said, "Come on, girl, your momma don't mind. You don't mind, do you, Dinah? Tell the girl to come on over and get it."

She felt Jep release her hand. She clutched the air, reliving the helplessness she'd felt watching her aunt dropping the egg on the floor. The thunder gnarled above and echoed the tone of her uncle saying, as he touched Jep's arm, "My, you've turned out a fine young lady, Jep. You're looking as fine as your momma, and I bet your momma's proud of you."

Jep stood between his legs and opened the gum wrapper. Her uncle's hand went around her head, stroked her hair and down her back. "Tell you

what, Dinah, seeing as you got your hands so full, how about I take care of Jep for you.” He looked down at Jep. “You’d like that, Jep. Uncle’s got a horsey you can ride.” He moved his knee up and down and laughed. “You just go on and do your shopping, Dinah, and I’ll make sure she gets home in a bit. Don’t you worry about nothing.”

She felt the wind nearly knock her over and watched her uncle turning back into the car, pulling Jep with him. At first she thought the sound was birds crying from a nest she couldn’t see beneath the awnings of the store or hidden in the cluster of oaks beyond Mitchell’s. The voice tore through the din of thunder overhead, nearly a shriek, one she had known so well it was unmistakable. Then it was clear and coming from Jep.

“Momma!”

An arm of lightning reached across the sky. She grabbed Jep’s hand and pulled her away and held her close to her leg. Thunder shook the building and a smell rose in a vapor from the asphalt. Her hair matted with rain.

Later, the words would come to her, the things she would say to her uncle. She would play out the scene, seeing the shame in his eyes, seeing the regret in her parent’s faces, seeing how she would put everything right, and let them all know she would never again be the keeper of secrets.

The surge of feeling, the certainty of her action, stayed with her through the vegetable bins, but by the time she reached the bread stacks, she knew she would never say anything to anyone. Some things could never be done, could never change, and the only hope was to escape the thin shell that kept her in her place.

She moved quickly through the aisles, holding her baby and keeping her eye on Jep. She thought about Randy Thurman. She wondered what time the sun would come up.

MARY ELIZABETH PARKER

Odalisque

On a wide couch of black velvet,
she lies back after swaths of years

she kept buttoned up.
Opening now not to expel

children into the world, but to sink back in cushions,
receive air's embrace. Light as clean

as lemon wedges stripes the cornices,
spritzes the kitchen counters.

Receiving at the door only
men who bring Turkish carpets—

wide sleeves of their shirts pushed up,
arms open to her—she's decided

never to dress again:
let the variegated flesh

build its own mosaic.
Solely on state occasions,

she will wear a flame-gold drapery,
internal combustion, bloom at top speed.

MOLLY PHIPPS

Rita Faye and Dean Lived

They can't tell their stories anymore.
They lie with memories in caskets
beneath the ground of a South Carolina cemetery.

Once in backyards they played,
handfuls of soft, cool grasses,
but now they can't tell their stories anymore.

They can't tell what they made
for science fairs or threw touchdown passes
beneath the ground of a South Carolina cemetery.

Did they meet their sweetheart on the promenade?
Did they save each other dances?
Well, they can't tell these stories anymore.

When they got their first place,
they never took any chances.
Beneath the ground of a South Carolina cemetery –

they lie and lie in the grave,
untold stories surround them in masses.
No, they can't tell me stories anymore
from beneath the ground in a South Carolina cemetery.

WILLIAM REICHARD

In the Form of Snow

As if sky and land
 have been inverted,
 and countless crystalline flakes
 are falling to the ground
 like innumerable stars.
But the earth won't keep them,
 not this early in the story.
They'll lose their light and weight
 and disappear into the ground,
 sinking to the planet's core,
 to join the fire there
 that powers us through.
And the sky?
Now a dark, blank shawl of night.
Nothing left with which to navigate;
 storied heroes stamped
 in motionless time,
 the great gears of the heavens
 having seized up.
After the confusion, the disorientation
 of emptiness, everyone gets
 back to their lives.
Stars continue to fall all through
 the dark months.
No one remembers a thing.

CHARLES REYNARD

Retreat from Tucson

*I will lure you to the desert;
there I will speak to your heart.*

As he learned the palo verdes,
along the parched path of river,

their form a burst of quiet
green fire-work, he recalled

their grace, in a distracted way,
bustled on the busy plane, saw it

in the baby's hair sprouting
from the crown of her head.

He looked through the window
for downy debris of *desert*

broom, saw only the risen dust,
girdling ghostly Catalinas,

blocking ascent of fuel gases,
trapped distress of inversion.

Yes, we have no rain for today,
nor for weeks and weeks of winter.

He heard ancestors, sentinel
saguaros, their suppliant arms

praying Dear God of the desert,
speak in a storm cloud voice today.

First couplet from Hosea 2:14

SUSAN SHAFARZEK

The Lamppost

Back there, in my
mother's living
room, the tiny figure
of a drunk
with rumpled coat and tie
undone leaned – *lolloped* –
against a tiny lamppost
in an ashtray on the table next
to the Philco radio, in front
of the window with
the hanging frame of glass
shelves and the cactus
plants.

It was all so dry
it needed dusting
several times a day. So, why
do it anyway? my mother liked
to say. The drunk,
his empty bottle raised
on high, could only
smile, the way that drunks
can only smile. If he
had anything to say, I don't
know what it was, except

he seemed to say it
all day long, perched safe
above the cigarette butts,
to his only pal, the lamppost,
who would never tell him
to shut up.

JOSEPH SOMOZA

Mellow Season

Boughs like umbrellas
that give shade and cover
to the black cat

preening in the quiet
back yard I've returned to, such
stillness I can hear

my blood flow,
and the dim rumble of an engine
somewhere

in this valley town,
wheels meshed and turning
at the weekday tasks of

work and school,
the houses in the neighborhood
vacated for the day,

even the trees empty of
birdsongs this mid-morning
in October, month of relief

from heat,
and of anticipation
of life ebbing

in leaves, grass, and
sky,
so that the buses bringing

people home from work soon will
glow inside,
and winter cold will

plummet through the dark
and enter any window
left open from summer.

JULIE STUCKEY

For Lew

*Long afternoons of childhood, not yet cleared
of brambled undergrowth near the creek –
chokeweed run rampant beneath sweaty bare feet
hurrying to mudded coolness. Cicadas thrummed
their cadence to our scrambling wildness.
When, then, did the clear-cutting begin?
I do not want to call up the losses –
want, instead, to look back on my own strength
in following you boys where I would.
I, too, soared across the ravine on vines
tangled in vast treetops, trailers reaching down
as fibrous freedom. Your long fall
left you writhing on forest floor,
(although you bragged about that spectacular descent.)
The flying had forever changed, and you
began your long *time of defenseless waiting*,
preparing for the inevitable splintering after impact.
Too afraid to follow, I watched you hurl yourself
into the world. *What terror flung your heart
out of the track of its fleeing...* keeping me
pinned here in petrified silence?
Even the fallen leaves rattled your absence.*

*Quotations from *Duration of Childhood* by Rainer Maria Rilke

JASON TANDON

After Rain

Banks of purple clouds crimp the sky
and a breeze whips through the porch screen
riffing the unread *New Yorkers*
and cooking magazines.

Still strapped and buckled in his car seat
the baby begins to doze.

In the kitchen my wife makes pizza
with anchovy and artichoke, basil and tomato,
and I think of our neighbors
who gave us this armchair I'm sitting in—
Andy laid off,
the family forced back to Georgia.

The nuthatch and titmouse return
to the feeder, and the goldfinch zips nearer,
despite the blue jay's bullying.

Now the sound of chirping birds
from under the dripping leaves,
the baby with his old man baldness
snoring delicately, the ping
of the oven rack
under the weight of loaded stone.

CHELSEA USHER

Battlefield of the Night

A chipmunk searches the ground,
scratching out tiny morsels of food
but always watchful, cautious, looking
for the owl's gleaming yellow eyes.
A branch snaps and he scurries for cover,
sliding breathless beneath an old rock.

Another here is hidden, hugging the rock.
It coils around, scaly skin matching the ground.
Again the chipmunk scrambles for cover
but nature has spoken: a snake's food
he must supply. The onyx, black eyes
strike—it coils. Swallows. Sits looking

into the forest, tongue flickering, eyes looking,
checking for danger apart from the rock.
The feathered beast opens his yellow eyes,
swoops effortlessly, noiselessly, to the ground,
snatches for himself the snake as his food,
and returns to his perch, camouflage his cover.

His eyes study the rest the dark will cover,
the opossum slinking past, the wolf looking
to provide for mouthy pups in need of food.
A cricket crawls along the worn, grey rock,
leaps onto leaves strewn about the ground,
flicks the antenna taking place of his eyes.

The owl turns his gaze; his yellow eyes
land on a mouse without any cover.
Leaving the branch, soaring closer to the ground,
he holds steady as the mouse keeps looking,
scurrying over root and limb, stopping on the rock,
then snatched up as the next victim in the chain of food.

The sun begins to rise—he finishes his food
as the things of night trade with the daylight eyes,
as songbirds and rabbits emerge from cover,
and a butterfly lights on the old, worn rock,
the battlefield of night, antenna looking
for flowers or rotten berries on the ground.

The owl steps back into his straw nest, daytime cover,
closes his eyes to rest, done looking
at the bones laying by the rock on the ground.

MARSHA MATHEWS

More Than a Mess of Greens

Hobart ticked off Mama something fierce when he blessed the meal without mentioning their guest, Birdie Dee. He didn't have to look at Mama's sour face to know it. Palpitations of disapproval seethed from her unsmiling, un-talkative, pinched-in mouth. She creased and re-creased her napkin. Birdie Dee was the Indian girl Mama met at the Laundromat in Slowburn. Mama worked her butt off the last couple of weeks to connive a plan to bring this girl to salvation, and now what? He'd punched a hole in her very first step, supper. Proper prayer before eating was key. Like the key to your truck. You had to stick it in the groove and turn it before you could get it rolling up the mountain quick enough to keep from rolling back. *But, too late now.* He left the girl out of the prayer like she wasn't here. Mama would have to rev into second gear, fan her social feathers, scratch dirt, if she had to, to find out how far the girl, a Cherokee, needed to come.

Several weeks back, Mama referred to her as that heathen, but today, it was *Indian princess*. Oh, the girl had a way about her, alright, a bit of a glide to her step, a regal poise to her bearing. And them legs, holy Jesus on a mountain. She sure as shooting wasn't the type to sit around the house, not with that definition of muscle, skin the color of sweet potato pie. He had to admit he didn't expect Mama's guest to be so young and easy on the eyes. Sure, he knew what was expected of him. He had good manners, for the most part. He knew he should have thanked the Big Guy for bringing her to their table, at least for Mama's sake, but he just couldn't. Not after she'd shaken his hand with the aplomb of a mosquito bite, barely touching him, and then called him sir. *Dadgum*. He felt over the hill, just pondering it. And here he was, just into his thirties.

He piled his plate, as would any man, with country ham, mashed taters, fried apples, pickled beans, okra, salad greens, three deviled eggs, corn on the cob, and two hunks of cornbread, which he slathered with honey butter. He wanted more, but when he noticed the girl gazing, he put a piece back.

Mama's chin, well, all of them, looked stiff as good quality particle boards. They usually swung from her face with the ease of hammocks. *She must be real tense*, he thought. He decided he'd best confront her instead of letting her sulk. "Something on your mind?"

Mama finished chewing, then surprised him by going after the girl instead. "I couldn't help but notice you kept your eyes open during the blessing, Birdie Dee."

Hot damn. Hobart sloshed more gravy over his taters. *Least she ain't ragging on me.* He could get used to watching a war from the sidelines.

"Don't you believe in prayer?" Mama asked her.

"Oh, sure. I . . . we have, I mean, in school, we had silent, uh — "

Hobart reeled his eyes in from the girl. When she looked at him with those eyes, steely as ball-bearings, she looked so forlorn, he wanted to help her out. She expected him to. Maybe being a sir wasn't such a bad do, after all. He drew in a breath, pumped up his chest. "Mama, to see her, your own eyes must've been open, too. Don't you believe in — "

"Hey, now. I just caught a glimpse of her as you was hitting the amen."

He popped a piece of deep-fried okra into his mouth. The crisp coating with a hint of garlic, he dashed with his molars, and the okra turned to sweet juice on his tongue.

"Before the, you know," the girl said, "the announcements? We had a moment of silent meditation."

Mama squinted at her. "You call that prayer?"

"Sure. Sometimes listening for what the Spirit has to say is important. As important as telling him what we need."

Hmm, Hobart thought. *This girl's got a different way about her.*

Mama looked like she was about to spit. Then the girl spoke in her soprano drawl.

"Don't you think?"

The girl's voice lingered like a tune: "Don't you think?" He could listen to the rise and fall of her voice all day. Even though her point about listening for God was a dumbass idea, it gave him a kick. And, for once, Mama didn't know what to say. *Look at her,* he thought, *staring at her plate, stirring her greens for no good reason.*

Birdie Dee forked a deviled egg in half and nibbled it. She reminded him of a chipmunk, taking in just enough to taste. "Say a deer gets shot," she said. "The Deer Spirit circles around it and asks it if it heard the hunter pray for pardon."

Hobart muffled a laugh. He grabbed his sweet tea, gulped some down. *This Indian girl's too much.* He snickered, thinking how glad he was that Mama had talked him into coming tonight. This beats *Saturday Night Live.*

Birdie Dee put her fork down and sat still, watching him.

He didn't mean to do her any dishonor. He looked away and took a bite. His tongue found a few lumps, so he knew Mama made the potatoes fresh, not something from a box, that's for sure. But eating did nothing to cut the girl's stare. *She's eyeballing me. Well, I best play along, be nice like Mama said. After all, the girl's just lost her Pa.* He winked, and she dropped her gaze. But Hobart couldn't resist making one little taunt. "What then?" She nodded, and her adorable little lashes reached for him.

"Suppose the hunter don't pray none?" he said. "What then, Birdie Dee?"

"Spirit would track him to his tent. . . ."

Hobart curled his lower lip and made a smack-hiss that sounded like a trash bag unfolding.

"And cripple him with rheumatism."

Hobart's chest quaked, and he burst out laughing. Bits of potato spattered the tablecloth. His shoulders shook. His lungs heaved. His eyes watered.

Mama's displeasure surfaced like a blister. All that skin pulling inward was not attractive. He stopped laughing.

"Then again," the girl said, "there's some animals that sacrifice themselves, on purpose."

Almighty Moses. Don't this dumb female know when to zip it? Can't she see Mama ain't buying it? "On purpose, huh?"

"They lay themselves out for the kill, to hunters who give them proper respect."

Hobart took a swig of tea and swirled it around in his mouth before swallowing. *Just like my ex-wife, self-sabotaging. Don't this beat all? Don't this Indian girl know deers can't think? She's got herself one heck of a case of Bambicitis.*

Birdie Dee picked up her napkin and dabbed her mouth.

Hobart couldn't take his eyes off her. Never in his life had he seen anyone wipe a mouth with so much delicacy. *Them's good full lips. But that don't make up for what she said. Deers giving themselves up to the hunter? What man in his right mind would want to hunt if the deers called the shots? Criminy.* He popped a biscuit into his mouth, whole. This was not the religious conversation he expected. *And poor Mama.* Her face might as well be one big onion. He'd never known her to shut down this way.

A smile wavered on his face when he thought of sharing Birdie Dee's views on hunting with his buddies. How would he ever again stand in the

woods for hours, waiting for game when Birdie Dee's dumb-assed notions might jump him and set off a gullywash of hysteria? "Lord Almighty, deer hunting ain't never going to be the same after this."

Mama set her cup down, *whomp*. Her upper lip rippled as she looked at the girl. "Who in tarnation's been filling your ears with all that nonsense?"

The girl's words came fast and hot. "My grandpa, that's who." She said it like that was all to be said. Like a boulder of truth that couldn't be shook. "My grandpa."

Hobart and his mama exchanged looks that said, What-do-we-do now?

"Grandfather Laughing Horse said animals want to live in harmony with us. Said *we're* the ones who butt in, mess everything up."

"Sure, sure." Hobart said. "Animals is our friends and all that. That's why I always call a whitetail to give me a lift when my truck's on the blink."

The girl's eyes flashed. "Not that kind of friend."

Hobart squeezed his fork till his knuckles burned. This girl was pretty, but she was dense. "Never in all of my born days," he muttered.

"Birdie Dee?" Mama had on her pleated, change-the-subject voice. She sliced some meat. "You like my country ham?"

The girl hesitated. Her face settled back. A crease in her forehead disappeared. "I can eat it."

Hobart looked over at Mama, who he knew was expecting more, a compliment, words to cotton to, like "it's delicious, so tender, so tasty, the best I've had." She met his gaze.

"Sure salty." The girl's eyes flitted about the room.

Those ain't the right words.

"I guess I'm not used to it. My mom cooked different on account of. ..." Her voice dropped a notch. "Dad."

How she got the word out, Hobart figured he'd never know. His death was still fresh, three weeks. As she remembered, her face puffed and then grew still. After a few seconds, she trucked back in there, as if chit-chat helped her to somehow hold on.

"You know, *Kanuchi* and other Cherokee food."

"Kan-what-ky?" Mama asked. "We don't hold by nothing they eat, the far side of the ridge."

"Not Kentucky, Imogene. *Kanuchi*."

Hobart sat back in his chair. *Good god. Leave it to Mama to know what to say.*

"*Kanuchi*, groundhog and ramps, leather breeches, succotash, Knee-Dips, and let's see? What else? Hmm, yellow-jacket soup."

Hobart's jaw twitched. "Did you say, *yellow-jacket*?"

Birdie Dee, sipping her sweet tea, nodded.

"That's a new one, even on me," Mama said. "And I thought I heard it all."

"I knowed about mufflers on cars," Hobart said. "But not about jackets in soup."

The girl looked at him and blinked.

"She means bugs, Hobart," Mama said. "Bees?"

Hobart grinned. Since nobody got his joke about the mufflers, he had to do the smiling for everybody.

"Dad said . . ."

There was that word again, *Dad*. This time, the girl's mouth froze. Her eyes faded like she was sinking down a coal shaft.

Hobart put down his fork, and Mama pushed her cup away. Then the girl came out of it with a sputter and a cough. She picked up where she left off, her words limping. "Dad said that with raising up so many hungry boys (see, he had four brothers), my grandmother and grandfather had to find food, you know, where they could."

"I hear that," Mama said. "How's that soup made? Does ya catch yellow-jackets in a mayonnaise jar?"

"First off, you got to find a comb."

"God, I'm not sure I want to hear this."

"Stop your belly-aching," Mama said.

"It's easy, really. You put the comb on the stove till the grubs that aren't covered loosen up. Then you take it outside and tear them off. You bring it back in and put it back on the stove upside down till the papery covering turns, you know, crackly? Then, hold it over some wax paper and pick out the bees."

Hobart scrunched up his face.

"Get a soup pot going . . ." Instead of finishing her sentence, the girl swept her hand through the air like a confident coach.

But Mama still had questions. "To boil?"

"But first put the bees in, to brown."

Hobart wrinkled his nose and wriggled his lips in a way that said, *Gross* with a capital *G*.

"Then toss them in the pot with seasonings; a pinch of ginger would be right tasty."

"That's it?" Mama asked.

"And, oh yeah, a dab of butter." The girl looked at Hobart. "Just a dab."

"Ugh! You say your daddy liked that *uchi* stuff?"

"Uh-huh. Sometimes." The girl's eyes clouded.

Hobart raised his eyebrows. Mama was giving him the evil eye because he mentioned Birdie Dee's daddy. He frowned. He couldn't imagine a fine young girl like Birdie Dee losing her daddy. He felt for her; he really did. But there wasn't a thing he could do about it. Hobart was much too young to take on a paternal role. No way could he be the dadgum sir she called him when they first met. Not to her, not to anybody, no matter how much she needed it. He wasn't the sir type. Anybody who knew him would tell her that. But he had something to offer a girl like her, a girl, ripe and lovely yet punky enough to keep Mama from overtaking her like a coal truck.

If only the girl would notice. My hair ain't gray, my face ain't wrinkled, and my heart ain't shut. I got a good job as a contractor. And I own my Ford F-150, clear out. Hobart thought it time to send up a prayer request to the Big Guy.

He looked at Mama, so set in her beliefs. He looked at Birdie Dee, so fresh and broad-minded. Words formed and sat on his tongue. They sat and sat.

Mama and the girl chatted and pulled up the warm peach pie, slicing it open, loosening a full, sweet smell, unaware of Hobart's deliberation, unaware that the words of a prayer sat twisting on his tongue, itching for sendoff. Neither woman knew when Hobart sucked in the deepest breath of his life. Nor the moment he swallowed his plea and opened his ears.

NATHAN E. WHITE

As We Said Before

Waiting, I stare outside
at the dark branches,
overwhelmed (forewarned,
though) by your returning.
I write: *My hands were cold*
since they held nothing.

And then turn, drawing
your name across this page,
listen for the next
rising laterally,
faintly: vital seams
scanned only at your own—

Allowing just this
reason for our voices
as the silence (strangely
unknown) comes and waits
on branches, just once
everything in its place...

as before. What is a history to words?

VICKI WILKE

Eleanor

Somehow she knew it all, neighbors
moving in, moving out,
the tawdry tangle of people's lives
on a winding lane.

Ninety years gave her an edge,
a cool tone of knowing, the ordinary
folding its soft worn wrap
around brittle bones, by day's end.

Her neighbors brought food, kind words
on china or paper, she chattered of times
etched on her savory skin, languished for
the broken, the cold shame of scattered clan,
fractured she claimed, so fractured,
as her silvery mane trembled.

She bided, the mundane ticked along,
day by day, prim white walls,
her cradle, her crypt, picture window
to the winding lane, cancer rocking
in her chair,
she died alone there.

HAROLD WHIT WILLIAMS

Young Guitarist Glimpses Mount Fuji in October

Spotted from the teenager-crowded
Top of Tokyo Tower, it hovers in haze,

A digital white blip above endless sprawl.
& on the observation deck, a tallish

Anglo man-boy shuffles about, red-
Eyed & sweaty & reeking of butter.

He speaks to reporters & hangers-on,
Says - I love the udon noodles, I love

The porcelain doll-like women, I love
The pachinko parlors, I love the dead

Leaves falling fast from your native
Maple trees, floating to wet grass

In groups of five, then seven, then five.

JEFF WILLIAMS

Distant as Laredo

We are as far apart as Laredo from the moon,
our hardened hearts, warriors' dress of steel.
You dreamt of sundials and desert scrub grass.
I longed for miles of tall trees, rivers, rain.

But once in clouds of a Blue Ridge knob,
cold wind dissuading crowds from ascent,
we had a sense of glancing at the face of god,
an immense door, a place we never saw again,

that time, distant as Polaris from Octantis,
gone in an instant from the dream of icy fog,
away like bats from underneath a ridge,
drifted like rafts down the sinuous Rio Grande.

LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN

The Punishment

Like all the doors here, it is not solid wood,
but shellacked and stained particle board

with a hollow center. She enters the room,
and shuts the door to dismantle the joints.

The metal pegs rise from their hinges,
release, and disappear into her pocket.

She turns the doorknob and pulls the door free
from the sill to carry it easily down the stairs.

At the landing, she repositions her hold
to make the turn and continues on to her room.

Done with the task, she readies for errands.
As she turns to lock up her bedroom to go,

she glances back at the morning's work.
Against her wall leans my bedroom door.

Ars Portulaca

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JEFFREY ALFIER is a 2010 nominee for the UK's Forward Prize for Poetry. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Emerson Review*, *South Poetry Magazine* (UK), and *New York Quarterly*. His latest chapbook is *The Gathering Light at San Cataldo* (2012), and his first full-length book of poems, *The Wolf Yearling*, will be published in 2012 by Pecan Grove Press (US). He is founder and co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* (www.sprreview.com).

KATHERINE BAILEY is a senior from Vero Beach, Florida. She has a major in graphic arts and a minor in photography.

PETER BERGQUIST earned a B.A. in English from Princeton University and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Antioch University Los Angeles. He is currently teaching English in the Los Angeles Unified School District. His poems have been published in *The New Verse News*, *The Sylvan Echo*, *The Two Hawks Quarterly*, *The Queen City Review*, *A Handful of Dust*, and the *Broad River Review*, among others. His poem "Gristle on the Bone" was a previous finalist for The Rash Award in Poetry.

JAN BOTTIGLIERI is a freelance writer living in suburban Chicago. She is an associate editor for the literary annual *RHINO* and received her M.F.A. in Poetry from Pacific University. Jan's poems have appeared in journals including *Harpur Palate*, *Court Green*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Rattle*, and *Margie*, and anthologies including *Solace in So Many Words* and *Brute Neighbors*. She was a finalist in the Chicago Poetry Center's 7th Juried Reading and has received two Pushcart Prize nominations.

BILL BROWN just retired as a part-time lecturer at Vanderbilt University. He has authored five poetry collections, three chapbooks and a textbook. His three current collections are *The News Inside* (Iris Press 2010), *Late Winter* (Iris Press 2008) and *Tatters* (March Street Press 2007). Recent work appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *English Journal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. Brown wrote and co-produced the ITV series *Student Centered Learning* for Nashville Public Television. The recipient of many fellowships, he recently received the Writer of the Year 2011 award from the Tennessee Writers Alliance.

MARJORIE BRUHMULLER was a finalist in *Glimmer Train's* New Writer's Short Story Contest (2002), her poems have appeared in *Grain*, *Event*, *Room*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The Poetry Project* (Tupelo Press), *THEMA*, *California Quarterly*, *Willow Review*, *Taproot IV*, *The Light in Ordinary Things*, *The New Writer* (UK), *Sleet*, *The Frogmore Papers* (UK), *Other Voices* and *Nashwaak Review*, *The Ottawa Arts Review*, *Poetry Quebec*, and *Criterion*, and again in *The Centrifugal Eye*. She won Third Prize in *FreeFall's* Poetry Contest 2010, and was a finalist in the AWA Pat Schneider First Annual Poetry Contest in 2011. She lives in Quebec, Canada.

MATTHEW BURNS is an Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at Heritage University in Washington State. He holds a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from Binghamton University where he was co-editor of *Harpur Palate*. He was

the winner of the 2010 James Hearst Poetry Prize from *North American Review*, and his poems and essays have appeared in/on *Folk Art*, *Ragazine*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Upstreet*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Jelly Bucket*, *Memoir (and)*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Anderbo*, and others.

BEN E. CAMPBELL is a native of southeast West Virginia and the author of the short story collection *A Welcome Walk into the Dark* (Outskirts Press). His stories and essays have appeared in more than two dozen venues, among them the *Roanoke Review*, *Now & Then*, and *Yemassee*. He teaches full time at New River Community College in Dublin, Virginia.

LAURA CARTER lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where she works and plays. She has recently been published on the Best American Poetry blog's National Poetry Month website. She has a dog and cat that keep her company. She also curates the Poetry Series at the Music Room in Edgewood.

KEVIN MARSHALL CHOPSON received his M.F.A. from Murray State University and is a recent Pushcart Prize nominee. His work is published or forthcoming in *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *REAL: Regarding Arts and Letters*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Poem*, *New Madrid*, *the Aurorean*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *English Journal*, *Concho River Review*, and *Nashville Arts Magazine*, among others. His work will also appear in the Tennessee edition of the *The Southern Poetry Anthology* to be published by Texas Review Press in 2013. Chopson teaches writing at Davidson Academy and Volunteer State Community College, both just north of Nashville, Tennessee.

TOBI COGSWELL is a two-time Pushcart nominee. Credits include *Illya's Honey*, *REAL*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Slipstream*, *StepAway* (UK), *Turbulence* (UK), *Front Porch Review*, *Rufous Salon* (Sweden), and *Ballard Street Poetry Journal*, and are forthcoming in *Bacopa*, *Compass Rose*, *Alligator Stew* (UK), *The Broken Plate*, *Border Crossing*, *I-70 Review*, *Incandescent* (UK), and *Pale House - Letters to Los Angeles*. Her latest chapbook is *Surface Effects in Winter Wind* (Kindred Spirit Press). She is the co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* (www.sprreview.com).

EMILY CORNISH first discovered her love of writing as a child and has been writing ever since. She completed her secondary education at School of the Arts, where she was first exposed to writing poetry in its many forms. She was a two-time winner of the Sokol High School writing contest in poetry, receiving first and third place awards. In her own work she explores a variety of forms and subjects weaving mythology and reality, the past and the present. Today she is working towards publishing her poetry while pursuing a bachelor's degree in art history at Nazareth College. Emily also enjoys camping and cooking for her friends and family, both of which are reflected in various pieces of poetry. She currently resides in Rochester with her significant other Brian and their two cats.

THOMAS RAIN CROWE is an internationally recognized author whose work has been published in several languages. As a poet, translator, editor, publisher and freelance writer, he is the author of thirty books of original works including *Rare Birds: Conversations With Music Legends* and the multi-award winning book of nonfiction *Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods*, published in 2005 by the University of Georgia Press. As an editor, he has been an instrumental force behind such magazines as *Beatitude*, *Katuah Journal*, and the *Asheville Poetry Review*. He

has translated the work of such prominent writers as Hafiz, Guillevis and Yvan Goll. He is founder and publisher of New Native Press. His literary archives have been purchased and are collected by the Duke University Special Collections Library. He lives in the Tuckasegee community in rural western North Carolina.

SARA DAVIS is a retired English teacher and a fellow of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project at the University of Pittsburgh. She continues to work with Young Writers Institutes. Her poetry has appeared in *The Pittsburgh Press* and has been anthologized in the annual Writing Project chapbooks *Threads* and *Riverspeak*, as well as *PoeArt: Where Poetry, Spoken Word and Visual Art Intersect*, a series of readings in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. Her work is also included in *Lavanderia, A Mixed Load of Women, Wash, and Words*, published by City Works Press.

DENNIS DONOGHUE'S work has appeared in various magazines and journals, most recently in *Literary Juice*. He has taught public elementary school for the past 33 years and lives in Rowley, Massachusetts, with his wife and three daughters.

MICHAEL DOWDY is a professor at Hunter College of the City University of New York, where he teaches American poetry and Latina/o literature. He has published a chapbook (*The Coriolis Effect*), a book of poetry criticism, and poems and scholarly articles on poetry in numerous journals and anthologies.

CYNTHIA SCHWARTZBERG EDLOW'S poetry collection, *The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphor*, is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry in 2012. Her poetry has appeared widely in literary journals and anthologies, and she has new poems appearing or forthcoming in *Folio*, *James Dickey Review*, *Georgetown Review* and the international anthology *Dogs Singing (A Tribute Anthology)*. In 2011, her poem "The Persimmon Can See You" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

CLIFFORD PAUL FETTERS has poems published or forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *Poetry East*, *Appalachia*, *The Willow Review*, *William & Mary Review*, *Ibbetson Street Press*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Oxford American*, and many others. He lives in Miami with his writes-like-a-dream wife, Debra Dean.

NATASHA HAYS is a developmental pediatrician who lives in Forest City, North Carolina and practices in Morganton, North Carolina. She is the author of *A Toss of the Dice: Stories from a Pediatrician's Practice*, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers in London, England. Natasha has also won several first prizes and several honorable mentions in contests for literary magazines. She also reads her poetry regularly in the Isothermal Community College Poetry Slam and has won two first prizes and a second prize. Other hobbies include acting, singing, swimming, and mosaic. She is a member of Rutherford Community Theater and the Rutherford County Visual Arts Guild. Natasha has two children, Ariel and Alexander, ages 25 and 29.

JODY HERRING will graduate from Gardner-Webb University in May 2012 with bachelor degrees in English and psychology. He enjoys creative writing, listing John Cheever, Tobias Wolff, and Richard Yates as major inspirations. This is his first publication.

SUMMER HESS is a 2006 graduate of Gardner-Webb University where she studied English and Spanish. She was a 2011 Fulbright Scholar in Chile and is currently finishing her MFA in Nonfiction Writing at Eastern Washington University.

TABATHA HIBBS received her M.F.A. in poetry from McNeese State University in 2005. Her poetry has appeared in *Words, Words, Words: MSU Department of Languages Alumni Magazine*, in *The Arena: A Collection of Literary and Artistic Expression*, and in the *Broad River Review*. Hibbs is currently a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Tulsa, where she is a Bellwether Fellow and is completing revisions to her dissertation. She will graduate in July 2012.

JANE HICKS, a native of upper East Tennessee, is an award-winning poet and quilter. Her poetry appears in both journals and numerous anthologies. Her "literary quilts" illustrate the works of playwright Jo Carson and novelists Sharyn McCrumb and Silas House. The art quilts have toured with these respective authors and were the subject of a feature in *Blue Ridge Country Magazine* in an issue devoted to arts in the region.

LOWELL JAEGER, as founding editor of Many Voices Press, compiled *Poems Across the Big Sky*, an anthology of Montana poets, and *New Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from 11 Western states. His third collection of poems, *Suddenly Out of a Long Sleep* (Arctos Press, 2009) was a finalist for the Paterson Award. His fourth collection is *WE*, (Main Street Rag Press 2010). He is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Montana Arts Council and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize. Most recently Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse.

STEPHANIE N. JOHNSON'S first book of poetry, *Kinesthesia*, was published fall 2010 by New Rivers Press as a winner of the 2008 Many Voices Project. Her work has appeared in *AGNI*, *Borderlands*, *BPJ*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Water Stone Review*, and elsewhere. She holds a bachelor's in English from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Minnesota with a graduate minor in Complementary and Alternative Therapies (CAM). She currently lives in northern New Mexico with her husband and two daughters.

W.F. LANTRY, native of San Diego, received his *Maîtrise* from *L'Université de Nice*, and Ph.D. in Literature and Writing from University of Houston. Recent honors include the National Hackney Literary Award in Poetry, *CutBank* Patricia Goedicke Prize, *Crucible* Poetry Prize, Lindberg International Poetry for Peace Prize and 2012 *Potomac Review* Poetry Prize. His publication credits encompass print and online journals in more than twenty countries on four continents. *The Language of Birds* (Finishing Line Press 2011), is his lyric retelling of Attar's Conference of the Birds. He currently works in Washington, DC, and is a contributing editor of *Umbrella Journal*.

D.E. LEE'S work appears or is forthcoming in *The Emerald Coast Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, and *Conclave: A Journal of Character*. He was a recent finalist or honorable mention in contests held by *Redivider*, *Palooka*, *Nimrod*, and the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition.

MARYLEE MACDONALD'S fiction has appeared in *The Yalobusha Review*, *StoryQuarterly*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *North Atlantic Review*, *New Delta Review*, *American Literary Review*, *Blue Moon Art & Literary Review*, *Raven Chronicles*, *River Oak Review*, and others. She has been awarded an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship and her stories have won the Matt Clark Prize, the Barry Hannah Prize, and the ALR Fiction Prize. A retired carpenter with a master's in creative writing, she leads a fiction workshop in Tempe, Arizona.

MARSHA MATHEWS is a poet and novelist living in northwestern Georgia. "More than a Mess of Greens" is an excerpt from her novel-seeking-an-agent, *Blood Feather*. The story is her first published fiction. Marsha's second poetry book, *Sunglow & a Tuft of Nottingham Lace*, won the 2011 Red Berry Editions Chapbook Competition and has been nominated for a Georgia Author of the Year Award. Her first book is *Northbound Single-Lane* (Finishing Line Press, 2010).

KARLA LINN MERRIFIELD, a seven-time Pushcart-Prize nominee and National Park Artist-in-Residence, has had nearly 300 poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has seven books to her credit, the newest of which are *The Ice Decides: Poems of Antarctica* (Finishing Line Press) and *Liberty's Vigil, The Occupy Anthology: 99 Poets among the 99%*, which she co-edited. Forthcoming from Salmon Poetry is *Athabaskan Fractal and Other Poems of the Far North*. Her *Godwit: Poems of Canada* (FootHills) received the 2009 Eiseman Award for Poetry. She is assistant editor and poetry book reviewer for *The Centrifugal Eye* (www.centrifugaleye.com). Visit her blog, Vagabond Poet, at <http://karlalinn.blogspot.com>.

SARAH MERROW is known as a flute player and flute repair specialist, but she is also a poet. She has published non-fiction articles in *The Flutist Quarterly* and poetry in *The Wilderness House Literary Review* and *An Caomhnoir*, an Irish publication. Sarah lives in Baltimore, Maryland, and for poetic inspiration enjoys taking long walks and bicycle rides.

KAORI MIYASHITA-THEADO is a native of Osaka, Japan, where she studied English and Japanese Literature. Her interests in literary works are the wandering motif – from Wordsworth's wanderers and Kerouac's hoboes to traveling haiku poets – human nature, and naturalism. She composed her poem "Gasshō (Prayer)" after reading articles in Japanese newspapers following the Higashi Nihon Daishinsai (Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami). She is currently teaching Japanese at Clemson University.

JOE MILLS has published four collections of poetry with Press 53: *Sending Christmas Cards to Huck and Hamlet*, *Love and Other Collisions*, *Angels, Thieves, and Winemakers*, and *Somewhere During the Spin Cycle*. He also has co-written two editions of *A Guide to North Carolina's Wineries* with his wife, Danielle Tarmey, and edited a collection of film criticism entitled *A Century of the Marx Brothers*. He holds an endowed chair, the Susan Burress Wall Distinguished Professorship in the Humanities, at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

JOSHUA D. MINER is a doctoral candidate in American literary studies and Native American studies at the University of Iowa. He came to Iowa City from Red River prairie country, where he spent most of his childhood and received B.A. and M.A. degrees in creative writing and linguistics from the University of North Texas. At Iowa, he has focused his critical and literary work on the relationship between

contemporary indigenous, immigrant, and expatriate experiences. His most recent publication can be found in *Beyond the Border: Tensions Across the 49th Parallel*, an interdisciplinary examination of Canada-U.S. border dynamics produced through the University of North Dakota's Institute for Borderland Studies.

NANCY CAROL MOODY'S work has appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, and *Salamander*. She is the author of *Photograph With Girls* (Traprock, 2009) and has just completed a new manuscript titled *Negative Space*. Nancy lives in Eugene, Oregon, and can be found online at www.nancycarolmoody.com.

ALICE OSBORN is the author of three books of poetry: *After the Steaming Stops* (Main Street Rag, 2012), *Unfinished Projects* (Main Street Rag, 2010), and *Right Lane Ends* (Catawba, 2006). She is a manuscript editor, successful blogger, and powerful speaker. Alice teaches creative writing all over the country, where she uses sensory images and road-tested prompts to stimulate her students' best work. Her work has appeared in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Soundings Review*, and in numerous journals and anthologies. She lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with her husband and two children. Visit her website at www.aliceosborn.com.

MARY ELIZABETH PARKER'S poetry collections include *The Sex Girl* (Urthona Press) and two chapbooks, *Breathing In A Foreign Country* (Paradise Press) and *That Stumbling Ritual* (Coraddi Publications, University of North Carolina, Greensboro). Her poems have appeared in *Iowa Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *New Letters*, *Arts & Letters*, *Confrontation Madison Review*, *Phoebe*, *Passages North*, *Margie*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *Greensboro Review* (nominated for a Pushcart Prize). She is creator and chair of the Dana Awards in the Novel, Short Fiction, Poetry, and the Essay, offered since 1996.

MOLLY PHIPPS is a senior English major at Gardner-Webb University with a pre-professional emphasis and a minor in German. From Cherryville, North Carolina, Phipps will graduate in May 2012 and plans to attend graduate school next year. Phipps spends time with lots of books and her wonderful family. She also enjoys writing and cream soda of any color.

WILLIAM REICHARD is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *Sin Eater* (Mid-List Press, 2010). He is the editor of the anthology *American Tensions: Literature of Identity and the Search for Social Justice* (New Village Press, 2011). He lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

CHARLES REYNARD serves as Circuit Judge in Central Illinois. His poems have appeared on WGLT's "Poetry Radio" and in various anthologies and literary journals, including *AfterHours*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *LSF*. He is co-editor (with Judith Valente) of *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul* (Loyola Press, 2006). He is also the author of the chapbook *The Utility of Heart Break* (The Pikestaff Press, 2010).

JANE SAVAGE is from Marietta, Georgia, and will graduate from Gardner-Webb University in May 2012 with a bachelor's degree in English. Passionate about community building and the outdoors, Savage wants to one day start a sustainable community and retreat center with her soon-to-be husband. In the nearer future, she hopes to pursue a graduate degree in Conflict & Peace Studies.

SUSAN SHAFARZEK lives in Charlottesville Virginia and is one of the editors of *Streetlight Magazine*, an online magazine of art and literature. She is also an amateur photographer and volunteers at WriterHouse in Charlottesville.

AMY SNYDER, from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is a junior at Gardner-Webb University with a double major in English and history. She intends to be both an elementary school librarian and a fiction writer. In her spare time she enjoys reading the Brother Cadfael Chronicles and horseback riding. Previous publications include her short story "Fire" in the *Broad River Review* and her poem "In the Company" in the *Penwood Review*.

JOSEPH SOMOZA retired from college teaching some years back to have more time for living and writing. He has published four books and three chapbooks of poetry over the years. He has a book forthcoming of mostly short love poems, titled *Miraculous* and illustrated by Louis Ocepek.

CELISA STEELE'S poetry has appeared in *Tar River Poetry*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, and others. Her first poetry chapbook, *How Language Is Lost*, was published in 2011 by Emrys, an arts foundation based in Greenville, South Carolina. Learn more about Steele and her poetry at www.celisasteele.com.

JULIE STUCKEY grew up in Pennsylvania, graduated from the University of Delaware in business and currently lives in Pawling, New York. She is especially drawn to writing that is firmly rooted in the imagery of the natural world and has had numerous poems published online, in print journals and in anthologies. Several of her poems have received Finalist or Honorable Mention in various contests.

JASON TANDON is the author of three collections of poetry, *Give over the Heckler and Everyone Gets Hurt* (Black Lawrence/Dzanc Books, 2009), winner of the 2006 St. Lawrence Book Award, *Wee Hour Martyrdom* (sunnyoutside, 2008), and *Quality of Life* (Black Lawrence/Dzanc, forthcoming 2013). His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Bellingham Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and on *The Writer's Almanac*. He teaches in the writing program at Boston University.

JO BARBARA TAYLOR lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her poems have appeared in *Bay Leaves*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Bee Culture*, on *New Verse News*, and in the *Broad River Review* and several anthologies. Her chapbooks include *One Or Two Feathers* (Plan B Press, 2010), *Jake and Jill, the Story of a Marriage* (Ridgeline Press, 2011), and *Cameo Roles* (Big Table Publishing, 2011).

CHELSEA USHER is a native of Hendersonville, North Carolina, and will be graduating from Gardner-Webb University in May 2012 with a degree in English with a concentration in Writing. She is highly involved in campus life, serving as the president of the Honors Student Association and treasurer of Joyful Hands, a sign language ministry team. She is also a member of the Alpha Chi National College Honor Society and proud first-time puppy raiser for Leader Dogs for the Blind.

NATHAN E. WHITE is a writer and musician living in the Los Angeles area. He holds an M.F.A. in creative writing from New York University. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in such publications as the *Tulane Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *South Dakota Review*.

VICKI WILKE, from Clarkston, Michigan, marinated joyfully for thirty-three years in the antics of young children, both in teaching and in raising two ambitious daughters. Her background and life experience have given her ample inspiration, but little time to devote to writing. Recently retired, she is developing her craft and reveling in newfound opportunities and introspection through writing groups, conferences and workshops. Though much of her younger muse found voice in writings for and about children, recent work has placed in poetry contests and has motivated her to submit and expand her literary range. This is her first print publication.

HAROLD WHIT WILLIAMS - “a genuine power-pop guitar hero” according to Trouser Press - was born and raised in the musically renowned Muscle Shoals area of Alabama. He plays guitar for the critically acclaimed Texas band *Cotton Mather*, and his first solo record, *The Daily Worker Songbook*, was released in 2011. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Atlanta Review*, *Slipstream*, *Oklahoma Review*, *Weave*, and *Oxford American*. His poetry chapbook, *Waiting For The Fire To Go Out*, is available from Finishing Line Press. He lives in Austin, Texas.

JEFF WILLIAMS is an English instructor at Wayne Community College in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and despite great reluctance to do so in the past (having felt he had not yet earned the title), is now tentatively allowing himself in quiet moments to be called a poet. In addition to the *Broad River Review*, past work has also appeared in WCC’s *Renaissance* magazine as well as in *Aphelion: The Webzine of Science Fiction and Fantasy*.

CHRISTY WISE is author of *A Mouthful of Rivets: Women at Work in World War II*. Her essays are published in numerous literary magazines including *Inscape*, *Concho River Review*, *Oasis Journal 2008*, and *Spot Literary Magazine*. Her essay “Memory Book,” published in *Bayou Magazine*, was selected as a “Notable Essay of 2009” by Best American Essays. A native Californian, Wise lives in Washington, DC, where she is working on a collection of essays and completing a master’s of liberal studies at Georgetown University.

LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN has a doctorate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she teaches English. She is the author of five chapbooks, including *Branding Girls* (Finishing Line Press, 2011.) Her forthcoming chapbook is *She who Loves Her Father* (Dancing Girl Press, 2012). Her poetry has appeared in *Margie*, *Feminist Studies*, *Poet Lore*, *Cream City Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *The Sow’s Ear Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Her prose has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Spittoon*, *Blackbird*, *American Short Fiction*, *13th Moon*, and elsewhere. Her reviews have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *42Opus*, and elsewhere. www.lauramadelinewiseman.com

ELLEN WRIGHT’S chapbook, *In Transit*, was published in 2007 by Main Street Rag Publishing Company. Her poetry has recently appeared in *new ohio review*, *RHINO*, and *The Vermont Literary Review*. The recipient of a master’s degree in comparative literature from New York University, she makes her home in Brooklyn and her living as a musician.

CPSIA information can be obtained at www.ICGtesting.com
Printed in the USA
BVOW012245140512

290208BV00007B/1/P



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